



Archaeology of a  
Language Development  
Non Governmental Organisation:

Excavating the Identity of the  
English Language Educational Trust

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Doctoral Degree in Education

By  
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## Declaration of Originality

I, Rabikanth Dhunpath declare that this dissertation is my own work, and has not been previously submitted for any degree at any other university.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rabikanth Dhunpath', is written over a solid horizontal line.

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Rabikanth Dhunpath

March 2003

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An enduring complaint of many post-graduate students is that their supervisors and promoters attempt to cultivate intellectual clones out of them. I am eminently blessed in having Michael Samuel as my promoter. Michael is an accomplished scholar who values multidisciplinary and experimentation while consistently underscoring the importance of adhering to the critical and ethical dimensions of responsible research. When I first conceived of the notion of an institutional biography, it took no effort to convince Michael that it was a worthwhile endeavour. This work is a tribute to Michael's empathetic and nurturing approach to research supervision, a model worthy of emulation.

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# Dedication

I dedicate this work to my dear friend and wife, Shakila,  
to my daughter Serene and to my son Sheldon.

# Abstract

Any attempt at understanding the influences that impinge on teacher development in South Africa is incomplete without an exploration of the role of NGOs, particularly those alternative development agencies that were conceived in response to apartheid education and which continued to pursue progressive, contextually relevant interventions in the transitional democracy. Using the archaeological approach to excavate deep insights into the behaviour of a language development NGO, this study documents the institutional memory of the English language Education Trust (ELET). Portraying two decades of its history (1984 to 2001) through the eyes of key participants in the organisation, the study traces the multiple influences, internal and extraneous, that have shaped ELET's mutating identity as it negotiated the challenges of a volatile and unpredictable NGO climate.

The study pursues two reciprocal outcomes. First, it attempts methodological elaboration. In advocating transdisciplinary research, it borrows from the established traditions of empowerment and illuminative evaluation, appropriating their key tenets for an institutional evaluation. Underpinned by the genre of narrative research, the study expands the lifehistory method as an evaluative tool, providing opportunities for organisational members to engage in self-reflexive interrogation of the organisation's life as it negotiated a multiplicity of development challenges. Second, it attempts theoretical elaboration. It challenges classical organisational theory (which derives from the structural - functionalist corporatist mode of management theory), as conservative and inadequate in understanding the organisational culture of an NGO. The study proposes a post-structuralist mode of discourse analysis as complementary to classical management theory in organisational analysis.

Conflating theory and method provides incisive conceptual lenses to appraise the contribution of ELET to language teacher development. The study finds that while ELET has been complicit in allowing its mission as a counter-hegemonic agency to be undermined by its submission to normative, coercive and mimetic isomorphism, it nevertheless demonstrates agency to innovate rather than replicate. It achieves this despite the cumulative constraining pressures of globalisation, manifest through volatility in corporate funding, shifting imperatives of bilateral funding agencies, and the fickle agendas of the fledgling democratic government. The study demonstrates that, given these unpredictable conditions, NGOs like ELET are forced to reinvent themselves to respond to emerging development opportunities as a hedge against attrition. In this regard, ELET has benefited from astute management and a vigilant quest for home-grown intervention programmes as alternatives to imported literacy programmes, all of which helps it redefine what constitutes emancipatory literacies.

Despite its proven record of accomplishment as a site for alternative teacher development, the study demonstrates that a competitive higher education sector, a hostile policy environment and the debilitating reporting mechanisms demanded by funders results in ELET's potential as a site for 'authentic' knowledge production to be devalued.

A further consequence of this marginalisation is that the organisation finds itself increasingly vulnerable to co-option by the state as a functionary of service delivery, accounting upwards to funders rather than downwards to beneficiaries of development. The study argues that the exploitative relationship the NGO endures with other development constituencies is as much a consequence of the NGO's failure to embrace an expedient corporate culture as it is the failure of these constituencies to acknowledge the potential of the NGO. Hence, rather than preserve the antagonistic relationship between higher education institutes and alternative agencies for knowledge production, they will each benefit by mutually appropriating the accumulated expertise of the other, giving substance to the ideal of a community of reason through creative dialectical evolution. The study concludes with the proposition that one mechanism to operationalise the notion of a community of reason is community service learning, a partnership between higher education institutes, corporate funders and development NGOs, a relationship in which the NGO provides leadership in appropriating disparate energies towards the cultivation of a socially literate country.

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## Preface

This study commenced with a simple question: What makes some non-governmental organisations more successful than others? I was interested specifically in the mutating identity of the English Language Education Trust (ELET), founded in the apartheid years as an alternative agency for teacher professional development, of which I was a graduate. It soon became apparent that the answer to the question would not be as simple as the question itself, and conventional modes of enquiry would be inadequate in excavating the delicate contours of a NGO's life. Somewhat apprehensive at appropriating "the road less travelled upon", I was nevertheless inspired by the prospect of an institutional ethnography, of engaging in a study that had the potential of satisfying my intellectual curiosity, while simultaneously providing illuminative insights for members of the organisation. I was to learn later in the study that I was actually engaging in a mode of enquiry, relatively new in South Africa, but popularised in the USA as "empowerment evaluation". My choice of an institutional biography for this purpose proved gratifying, but hazardous, not least, because of the scale of the biographical data and the delicacy of the methodology. Negotiating the politics of disclosure required a fair measure of professional integrity and tolerance, coupled with frequent experiences of disillusionment, disappointment and sometimes-even frustration. In the end, the rocky journey was vindicated by the profound insights I derived into a range of issues, and I am richer for taking the road less travelled upon.

It is widely acknowledged that the Non Governmental Sector has played a crucial role in South Africa's history. Yet, there is surprisingly little written about this sector, resulting in a set of self-perpetuating myths around the role, effectiveness and present health of the sector. Chapter 1 explores the available literature on NGOs in general and language development NGOs in particular. It examines the conventional wisdom around the contribution of NGOs, evaluating, among others, the allegation that NGOs are little more than surrogates of the state. Section A of this chapter locates ELET (the site under investigation), within the broader Non Profit and development fields in South Africa. Having identified the critical questions, this section also provides a rationale for the study.

Language teacher development, a central focus of ELET's professional activities, has evolved from a structuralist foundational discipline (since its advent in the nineteenth century) into a flourishing industry, as the English language continues to colonise the globe. Section B of this chapter synthesises the dominant theoretical and methodological shifts that have characterised the craft of English teaching, focussing on the last two decades, in particular the period 1984 (the year ELET was launched) to 2001 (the year the data for this study was collected). Section C provides a brief overview of the research methodology, and a synopsis of the theoretical constructs in the study.

Like the dutiful artisan who seeks the most efficient tools for the trade, the educational researcher searches and re-searches the most appropriate method for enquiry. Chapter 2 interrogates the dominant canon in evaluation research, examining its appropriateness in excavating institutional identity. I contemplate the notion of a postmodern evaluation, proposing illuminative and empowerment evaluation, which have their roots in an anthropological conception of organisations and institutions. In advocating the lifehistory method to excavate institutional identity, this section synthesises some of its theoretical



tenets, providing some hints of caution about the potential hazards in appropriating this method uncritically.

The product of more than two years of in-depth interviews with individuals within and outside the organisation is an institutional biography entitled "Excavating the Identity of ELET". This chapter (3) documents the subjective experiences of members, attempting to capture the nuances in their voices as they reflect on the life of the organisation in its mutation over two decades. To maintain coherence and aid readability of this eleven-episode chapter, a variety of narrative techniques are used, ranging from first person narrator to omnipresent narrator and combinations thereof. The decision to locate this chapter before the analytical framing chapter is essentially a stylistic one. It is prompted by an appreciation that a reader will inexorably bring to bear his/her own theoretical orientation when engaging with a data set. Locating my own theoretical and analytical orientation in chapters 4, 5 and 6 rather than preceding the data chapter is intended to encourage an undirected reading of the narrative without the imposition of a predisposing analytical lens.

Chapter 4 attempts to find an appropriate lens to analyse the expansive biographical data. Having engaged in a survey of the ontological and epistemological foundations of institutional theory and organisational behaviour from its classical structural-functionalist roots, chapter 4 proposes discourse analysis as an analytical framework to appraise the potential of lay ontologies and agency in subverting or preserving organisational structure. Adopting a critical view of Giddens's "duality of structures", I interrogate the intersection between individual and organisational lives and signal the hazards of organisations 'engineering' enabling opportunities, which serve to make members complicit in perpetuating illegitimate organisational identities. However, conceiving of organisation as discourse permits a deeper understanding of the micro, meso, and macro levels of discourse as well as the mega and grand discourses which legitimise particular forms of organisational knowledge that perpetuate particular identities.

Using the principle of an institutional ethnography, chapter 5 appropriates the discursive positioning of organisational members as an analytical lens to view the mutation of the organisation as it negotiates the multifarious challenges that impinge on and craft its identity. Through a systemic analysis of ELET's trajectory, and using selected vignettes from members' discourses, Section A explores the impact of a variety of competing discourses on the organisation's mutation. Among these are the ubiquitous influence of globalisation on educational agendas, an unpredictable funding industry and a volatile higher education sector, which renders NGOs such as ELET simultaneously vulnerable, and potentially powerful, as they are forced into strategic innovation for survival.

An expression of ELET's innovation is its curriculum. Using document analysis based on a critical theory framework, Section B interrogates ELET's teacher development programmes, appraising the extent to which they live up to their emancipatory intent of providing a contextually relevant home-grown enactment of literacy, as opposed to the imported varieties that characterise the mainstream curriculum generally. Mindful of the hazards of identity slippage, of imperceptibly sliding from research to advocacy, section C of this chapter takes a more critical view of ELET, examining the organisations culpability in undermining its own potentiality in the development field.

Chapter 6 builds on the main theoretical positions illuminated in chapter 5. Commencing with a reappraisal of the original thesis that NGOs are surrogates of the state, this chapter advances an alternative thesis. It argues that ELET has undeniably been subjected to the isomorphic pressures of the global economy and its mutation is contingent upon of the will of funders, the volatile policy process and a higher education sector undergoing reconfiguration. It argues that, given these dynamics, ELET's mutation is symbolic rather than substantive. Therefore, in order to sustain itself in a global economy, it will have to shed its idealised identity as Good Samaritan and reposition itself as an agency for research production. Such a repositioning requires that the other constituencies in the educational enterprise reconsider the potential of NGOs in altering the patterns of knowledge production in a global economy. In this regard, this chapter argues that the state, the corporate sector and the higher education sector submerge their insular ideological positions in favour of cultivating a community of reason through creative dialectical evolution, where all knowledges, "legitimate" and "profane", are accorded space to flourish in new combinations of socially relevant knowledge. The chapter proposes Community Service Learning as a potential discursive space to unify the disparate energies towards realising the ideals of an emancipatory pedagogy.

Chapter 7, which is essentially a continuation of chapter 2, revisits the methodological wisdom of engaging in an institutional biography. It provides insights into my journey as a researcher, highlighting critical episodes as I negotiated the slippery terrain of appropriating a non-conventional approach. As a postscript to the thesis, this chapter concludes by inviting the reader to appraise the value of the study to educational research by examining some insights I offer into recent developments in ELET's metamorphosis.

## Defining the Discourse Terms<sup>1</sup>

The non-government organisation (NGO) sector has often been described as extremely diverse, heterogeneous and populated by organisations with hugely varied goals, structure and motivations. It is therefore difficult to find a generic definition of an NGO. It cannot be based on a legal definition because of the wide variations in laws relating to NGO activities, according to which, an NGO may have a legal status of a charity, non-profit association or a foundation. For this reason, the terms voluntary sector, non-profit sector, voluntary (sector) organisations and non-profit organisations (NPOs) are used interchangeably throughout this thesis, and refer to both non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and community-based organisations (CBOs). As used in South Africa, NGOs and CBOs denote organisations that pursue "development" rather than "welfare" objectives. NGOs are understood to be non-profit organisations, which provide some kind of professional service to community groups (such as civic associations, women's organisations, language development organisations, etc.). CBOs are organisations that bring together constituencies at a grassroots level, to take action and make representations on issues of common interest. CBOs are often the recipients of services provided by NGOs. They include, for example, civic associations, tenants' organisations, or groups seeking the return of land confiscated under apartheid.

I use these terms in the full knowledge that the definitions given are neither exclusive nor exhaustive. A CBO can, in certain contexts, provide services in the same way as an NGO. At the same time, depending on the context, one organisation can assume many identities, acting as a service organisation in one setting, a CBO in another, or a research body in another. The terminology used here therefore occasionally risks sacrificing analytical rigour for the sake of avoiding potentially confusing shifts from one term to the other.

### **2. Northern - Northern donors/funders**

Used broadly to refer to first (developed world countries) designated by their ability to offer development aid to developing countries.

### **3. Southern - Southern donors/funders**

Used broadly to refer to developing world contexts designated by the dependence on foreign aid.

### **4. State**

A reference to the nation state or government or the ruling party with Statutory powers.

---

<sup>1</sup> This definition is based on INTERFUND's note on terminology. Founded in 1986, INTERFUND is a consortium of non-governmental development organisations. With the support of donor agencies, INTERFUND's members work together to advance development and democracy in South and Southern Africa. The consortium mobilises resources, financial and non-financial, to support the initiatives of voluntary sector organisations and local or regional democratic institutions. In addition to funding, INTERFUND is active through other forms of programme support, including providing information, publications and lobby work, promoting public debate about development, and facilitating North-South cooperation.

# Chapter 1

## Theoretical, Methodological & Philosophical Trends in Language Development

### 1.1 Introduction

*“NGOs have been victims of their own success. The explosion initiatives designed to address NGO needs, reflected in myriad financing, budgetary and contractual procedures and consultation mechanisms, has completely suffocated the system. NGOs no longer know whom to address to solve problems. The mismatch between declining Commission resources and increasing tasks is only too evident. Nor has the Commission been the only organisation to suffer. The EU Member states have been trying to grapple with the same problem. At the political level, concerns are being expressed that NGOs have become too powerful and too dominant. Some consider that they lack political legitimacy; that they are undemocratic bodies answerable to no one. They believe the rush to jump on the bandwagon has led to the creation of many NGOs that do not appear to have the necessary expertise and skills. Impact studies in the field show that the picture may not quite as rosy as it should be. Some NGOs - now household names - have a remarkable track record in the field, but others have been found wanting... NGOs specialising in human rights, democracy and environmental issues have proved to be thorns in the flesh of many fledgling governments. The power they wield, promoting well-researched and hard-hitting campaigns, often fuelled by information gleaned from the Internet, can have a dramatic impact. New NGO networks are springing up all the time. Links are being established between groups in the North and the South and in the East and the West ”*

(Clarke, 2000)

Reflecting on 25 years of European Union (EU) support to Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) internationally, Tim Clark provides an image of them as diverse, complex and contradictory. With the increasing pace of globalisation, there has been a concomitant increase in the status and legitimacy of the international NGO as the voice of civil society. Their number, both national and international, have increased dramatically and, in South Africa alone, it is estimated that there are almost one hundred thousand in service, in various guises and at various levels of functionality. The behaviour of NGOs is “invariably normative, prescriptive, increasingly internationalised, highly politicised and at times very effective” (Keck & Sikkink, 1997; Higgort, 1999). In many instances, they have become the discursive and material terrain through which the marginalized subjects of anthropological / ethnographic research are brought into the public domain. While it has been argued that NGOs are an extension of civil society and

the public will (West, 2001), they are also the bureaucratic apparatus that produces, circulates and acts upon particular discourses about people and culture.

In an attempt to answer these and other questions, this chapter surveys the NGO landscape in South Africa, focusing on its contribution to Development in general and language teacher development in particular. The chapter is divided into three sections. **Section A** draws from the available national and international literature on the non-profit sector, exploring the sometime conflicting signals about the health and status quo of the sector, in an attempt to locate and evaluate the work of the **English Language Education Trust (ELET)**<sup>2</sup>, a language development NGO that has acted as service provider for teacher professional development in South Africa since the mid-nineteen-eighties. Having identified the critical questions, which hinge on the mutating identity of a language development NGO in the context of a transitional democracy, I declare the assumptions underpinning the study and provide a rationale for my choice of the research site and methodology.

**Section B** sketches the historical trajectory of language teaching and learning, focusing in particular on the twelve years from 1990 to 2002 (the pre & post apartheid period during which ELET was actively involved in teacher professional development). I identify the dominant philosophical, theoretical and methodological trends that have characterised language teaching during this period; explore contemporary developments in language teaching internationally; and locate South African language teaching experiences within the international context, all in an attempt to evaluate the extent to which ELET has embraced these changes and reflected these in its language pedagogy. This section is intended to synthesise the different theoretical positions presented with a view to constructing a framework that represents the milieu in which the study is conducted.

**Section C** provides a brief introduction to the methodological orientation of this study, articulating a rationale for the choice of illuminative and empowerment evaluation. The central focus of this study is the excavation of the identity of ELET through its two decades in existence as a language development NGO. This section also introduces some of the constructs associated with organisational theory, which will be used later to interrogate the data.

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<sup>2</sup> ELET is a non-government, non-profit organisation dedicated to teacher and learner development. The courses and materials they produce are primarily for the development of English language teaching in multicultural / multilingual contexts. The courses, originally accredited by the University of Cambridge, are now accredited by the University of Natal-Pietermaritzburg (UNP) and Vista University.

## Section A: Exploring the Non-Profit Sector

### 1.2 Introduction

Voluntary organisations had been on the development landscape before the twentieth century in both the North and the South. NGOs, as they are known today, are a more recent phenomenon, arising typically out of the independence struggles of the South. An example of this is the Gandhian movement in India whose many offshoots continue to flourish today (see Clark, 1991). During the post-war 1950s and 60s, the number of Northern NGOs offering development initiatives multiplied, operating in the refugee camps, hospitals, villages and slums. While in the earlier period they were relatively homogeneous in pursuing a common agenda, by the 1960s they became considerably more diverse, and increasingly more assertive (Clark, 1991). Having long played a significant role in education, beginning with the role played by religious organisations in spreading Western forms of schooling, many NGOs realised during the 1970s that there was a limit to what they could achieve, in the context of constraints imposed by the political and economic elites. Development was increasingly viewed as the process of liberating the poor from their physical oppression, and from their own resignation to poverty. Inspired by the liberatory politics of Paolo Freire, Brazilian NGOs pioneered the project of *concientization*, a combination of political education, social organisation and grassroots development. Under the broad banner of “empowerment”, of both the oppressed as well as the oppressors, NGOs embarked on development education and functional literacy programmes, which have since made a significant impact on pedagogy (ibid.: 36).

By the 1980s, NGOs had become increasingly visible in advocacy campaigns with the Northern ones in particular becoming more vocal. Since then, a mounting literature on globalisation and the changing nature of international relations has provided evidence of an increasingly strong and complex array of international NGOs emerging as “Transnational Advocacy Networks, that attempt to use their global visibility to effect changes at national level” (see Mundy & Murphy, 2001; Barnett & Finnemore, 1999). They are portrayed as the “building blocks of a prototypical global-civil-society” (Mundy & Murphy, 2001:86), with the power and potential to democratise the structure of world politics. Examples of these influential transactional NGOs include the “Global Campaign For Education” and “The World Education Forum” (WEF). However, the long term effects of this movement on world politics is less apparent.

A more recent trend influencing change in Southern official structures has been what David Korten (cited in Clark, 1991:38), calls “micro policy reform”. Official aid agencies have attempted, through their structural adjustment programmes, to position themselves as macro policy actors, in the belief that effective and sustainable development is only possible in policy friendly environments. They realised that NGO projects did not have the capacity to serve and benefit more than a few chosen communities, unless supported by local government and national development mechanisms. Consequently, many NGOs have attempted to bolster their sphere of influence by acting as catalysts for appropriate micro policy reforms.

In the 1980s and 1990s, NGOs expanded their spheres of influence to embrace a broad spectrum of activities ranging from multi-billion Rand food aid programmes to literacy

and environmental programmes. Clark (1999: 40), categorises NGO activities into 6 schools, according to their evolution (which might not accurately replicate the South African experience):

1. Relief and welfare agencies, such as the various missionary societies.
2. Technical Innovation Organisations (TIOs) which pioneer new or improved approaches to problems.
3. Public Service Contractors, funded mostly by Northern governments, working with Southern governments' official agencies.
4. Popular Development Agencies: Northern NGOs and their Southern counterparts which concentrate on self help projects.
5. Grassroots Development Organisations: Locally based Southern NGOs, some of which receive no funding at all, managing grassroots projects.
6. Advocacy Group Networks: Organisations that have no field projects but which exist for lobbying and education.

As indicated in the INTERFUND's pallet of definitions, it is difficult to distinguish one from the other as their colours often blend, giving no indication of the effectiveness of their interventions and contributions, although they are generally perceived to be worthy and efficient, hence consuming a significant amount of money from the North.

### **1.2.1 The Non-Profit Sector in South Africa**

There can be little doubt that in the context of South Africa, the multiple social formations that grew over the centuries "has profoundly affected the evolution of the large and diverse group of organisations that can only with great conceptual difficulty be categorised as the 'non-profit sector'" (Swilling & Russel, 2002:3). The difficulty with defining this sector more definitively is that it has enjoyed contradictory fortunes at different times in the country's history. For instance, for most of the twentieth century, the racially exclusive democracy in South Africa established by and for Whites was characterised by a stable interdependence between the state and the racially exclusive NPOs. During this time, the NGOs that emerged in disenfranchised communities were systematically repressed (ibid.: 4). After the first non-racial elections in 1994, the states policy of redistribution and development expressed in GEAR<sup>3</sup>, accorded a central role of NGOs as watchdogs of civil society.

However, despite the fact the non-profit sector has grown to become a major force in the South African economy, (consuming a total of R9 billion in operating expenditure)<sup>4</sup>, the post-election funding transition has been an especially difficult one for many NGOs. After the 1994 elections many foreign donors took one of two routes. Either they decided that, with apartheid dismantled, all was well and they focused on other global trouble

<sup>3</sup> In order to realise the state's agenda of reconstruction and development (RDP), it needed to articulate its role in neo-keynesian terms (i.e the state should play a welfarist role through interventionist economic policies). Hence, the RDP policy was replaced by the "Growth, Employment and Redistribution Strategy (GEAR).

<sup>4</sup> The John-Hopkins-South African study on the non-profit sector reveals that the combined expenditure of the non-profit sector represents 1.2% of the 1998 GDP, and is thus a major employer of full time, part time and voluntary workers.



spots, or they believed the fragile new government needed support and redirected their funding through bilateral agreements. Furthermore, other countries began to recognize South Africa's new Government of National Unity as a legitimate government they could work with. While NGOs have become a familiar feature in the South African development landscape, their precise role in the "new democracy" is the subject of heated debate and contestation. Their unfamiliarity in collaborating with, rather than opposing government structures, and, conversely, the state's suspicion of and resistance to the NGO's *modus operandi*, means that NGOs and the state often shared a hostile and confrontational relationship (Kraak, 2001). Some NGOs are reluctant to enter into a partnership with government for fear of being co-opted and losing their autonomy, and consequently the ability to respond to community needs. Where the links between NGOs and the state do exist, it is common for the former to deny the existence of these links (Roberts, 2002:28), ostensibly to preserve illusions of their revolutionary, autonomous stature.

While support to NGOs has continued since 1994, the usual practice of funding them directly was questioned, and direct funding plummeted (see Crockett, 2000). The donor community now prefers to channel a substantial portion of its funding through the official state apparatus, which often, contrary to the mission of the NGO movement, has its own agendas and imperatives. There was an expectation that after the political transition of 1994, the state would build strong partnerships with NGOs in key areas of delivery (Kraak, 2001). These expectations, Kraak suggests, were not unrealistic, given the government's controversial Reconstruction and Development Programme<sup>5</sup> (RDP). This expectation did not materialise. Instead, within a year of the RDP policy pronouncement, it was abandoned and replaced by the equally controversial Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) strategy with its emphasis on the market and private investment as engines of growth. This disingenuous dabbling in macroeconomic policy was further complicated by the incapacity of the public service to disburse funds, resulting in millions of donor funds being rolled over from one year to another. The present bureaucratic bungling in the national lottery, which several NGOs dreamed of as a lifeline, is a case in point. Other less obvious but pervasive influences on the capacity of the NGO sector, which Kraak identifies, are the complex archaic tendering procedures and obstructionist legal procedures inherited from the previous regime. The consequence is that many NGOs have found it difficult, if not impossible, to survive the substantially reduced funding quotas (Thomas, 1998). Amongst these were several language and literacy NGOs.

The untimely demise of language development NGOs came at a time when there was an absence of a coherent development strategy to address the language teacher development needs of its majority native population (see Hall & Hofmeyer, 1996). The absence of any meaningful development was particularly evident in the teaching of English as a second language (L2), where significant numbers of language teachers who were themselves functionally illiterate, waited passively for curriculum intervention from education departments (see Samuel, 1995). The task of development, which was abdicated by the official state apparatus, meant that alternative structures of power in the form of NGOs were tasked with service delivery. Motala & Husy (2001) argue that by the late 1980s,

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<sup>5</sup> A post-apartheid economic policy which attempted to address the economic inequalities amongst the different racial groups



state led development was no longer a popular paradigm. Instead, there was “inefficient management, bloated bureaucracies, shrinking productive capacity, the rise of new elites who fed off the public purse, and widespread public discontent”. To compensate for this lack of capacity, for several years preceding the 1994 democratic elections, South Africa was in receipt of substantial levels of international funding from donor agencies for language and other development agendas. The purpose of this aid was to bridge the gap between civil society and policy makers, and to strengthen the role of NGOs in the development of human capital in an emerging democracy. It was intended to respond, in particular, to the historically disadvantaged population, which was not serviced by state institutions.

After 1994, the sector had to retrench staff and some of its most skilled leadership was lost to the government and the private commercial sectors. Dangor, (2001 in Kraak, 2001:143) argues that government has moved from a “soft to a hard state: from a state that opens itself to influence and inputs from other stakeholders to one that inures itself against internal advocacy groups”. The failure of the state to reallocate resources and to reactivate the more influential NGOs has meant that the real beneficiaries are private enterprises and consultants with reticent bureaucrats often offering the cynical justification that NGOs do not possess sufficient capacity to deliver. While the above scenario characterised the post-1994 period, the present scenario reveals an ironic twist. It has become increasingly evident, even to the state, that it lacks the capacity to deliver, and resorts to farming out service delivery to NGOs (Roberts, 2002). In the research of JET (Joint Education Trust), it is apparent that school reform projects are increasingly being designed and implemented as partnerships between NGOs and the state. In JET’s 2001/2002 evaluation of twelve school reform projects, all but one was implemented by non-state agencies and only three reported that they work independently of the state (see Roberts, 2002). Several school development programmes have been instituted over the past five years, with an increasing number being commissioned every year, a significant number of these being initiated by the NGO sector with government involvement (Taylor, 2002:2). It is estimated that up to 20% of the nation’s nearly 30,000 schools are involved in donor and NGO related projects with a budget expenditure of R500m annually (ibid.:2). This includes five year commitments of R120m by USAID (United States of America Aid), and R300m by the Business Trust, R240m by DFID, smaller contributions by JET (Joint Education Trust), the National Business Initiative, The Royal Netherlands Embassy, and the Danish International Development Agency, as well as several smaller projects supported by a host of local and offshore donors (ibid.:2). This trend is consistent with the international experience, which indicates that NGOs are courted by both government and multilateral institutions (Clayton, 1996; Eade, 2000 in Motala & Husy, 2001), and evidenced by the fact that NGOs are involved in 38% of all active World Bank projects (ibid.). Motala and Husy (2001) provide the following list of possible reasons for the surge in interest in the NGO sector, as is reflected in International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank reports:

- 1 A perception of the limitations of the state as a vehicle for progressive social change due to its inability / unwillingness to be accountable to society.
- 2 Greater willingness to recognise the comparative advantages of NGOs to deliver at a local level.
- 3 Concerns over the economic inefficiencies of state delivery mechanisms.
- 4 NGOs do not represent a recurrent cost for the state e.g. for every US\$1 made available, the non profit sector was able to procure US\$13 of non state funding.

### 1.2.2 Challenging Conventional Wisdom on the NPO

Contrary to conventional received wisdom, Kraak, (2001) argues that levels of international development funding since 1994 have **not** decreased. Soni, (2000, in Kraak, 2001) found in an International Development (IDO) study, that aid emanating from the EU and the USA had remained relatively stable and had in fact increased over the previous two years. However, whether this increase was real in fiscal terms, or a consequence of plunging exchange rates, is not clear. Based on available data from bilateral and multilateral donors, the report (*"Synthesis Report: Development Co-operation Report II for South Africa 1994-1999", Draft Final, International Organisation Development, UK: August 2000*), found that total Official Development Assistance (ODA) commitments to South Africa - grants, concessionary loans and technical assistance - for the period 1994 to 1999, amounted to some R17.6bn. It was estimated that this undervalued the real level of ODA commitments by 4 per cent to 6 per cent, that is approximately R18.5bn. ODA commitments peaked in 1997 (R3.9bn), declining to R2.3bn in 1999, slightly below the figure for 1994 (R2.5bn). When adjusted for inflation, however, the total value of ODA in 1999 would be significantly less than in 1994. On average, South Africa received some R3bn in ODA per year, which supports previously cited estimates of ODA constituting around 1% of the South African government's budget (ibid.) A breakdown of ODA commitments over sectors showed:

- 1 The education sector received the largest share, with close to 22 per cent.
- 2 Second was the government and civil society sector (building good governance frameworks and institutional systems for delivery of social development) with some 19 per cent.
- 3 Other social infrastructure and services, including safety and security, were third, with about 13 per cent.
- 4 Close to 11 per cent of commitments went to water supply and sanitation. Health received approximately 7 per cent.

In terms of the recipients of ODA commitments, the report found that of out of the close to R10bn for which data was available (55 per cent to 57 per cent of total ODA commitments):

- around half went to government;
- a quarter went to parastatals; and
- close to 15 per cent went directly to the voluntary sector. (ibid.)

In monetary terms, the voluntary sector's share of ODA was R1.43bn. Extrapolating this percentage to total estimated ODA commitments (R18.5bn), real ODA going directly to NPOs would be in the region of R2.8bn, or an average of close to R480m per year. According to the report, direct ODA to civil society declined sharply from 1994 to 1995, while ODA to government increased, supporting widely held assessments that there was a pronounced redirection of foreign funding from civil society to the new democratic government. After 1995, however, direct ODA to the sector climbed steadily to reach almost the same level in 1999 as in 1994. In real terms (allowing for inflation), however, the 1999 level of direct ODA to civil society was substantially below that of 1994. (ibid.) For an estimate of total foreign funding to the voluntary sector, grants from foreign non-

governmental sources - foundations, NPOs, corporates and individuals - would have to be added. To date, no figures on funds from these sources could be located.

According to the Synthesis Report, ODA to South Africa shows no sign of decline in the near future, in spite of South Africa's ranking as a middle-income country. This seems to be the result of a combination of factors. Recognition of the country's enormous income inequalities, the high incidence of poverty and the importance of South Africa as a driving force in developing the rest of southern Africa, influences continued donor funding. Historical ties between certain donors and South Africa, established during the struggle against apartheid, also appear to retain some importance. Most donors have made substantial pledges beyond 2000. How much of this funding will find its way to NPOs, either directly or via government, remains to be seen. However, there are indications that the voluntary sector's share may be on the increase, mostly because of donor frustration with government delivery.

Nevertheless, the question that emerges is: In the context of potentially higher levels of bilateral and multilateral funding, why is it increasingly difficult for NGOs to access funding? Kraak (2001) argues that Northern donors have sought to relocate resources to projects involved in technical delivery of social services at the expense of research, project facilitation and human rights. Donors have also sought to reduce administrative costs by making larger grants to a smaller number of institutions, and by entering into multi-year rather than annual funding, favouring larger and more sophisticated NGOs to the detriment of smaller, innovative projects. Based on his subjective experiences as programme officer at INTERFUND, Kraak suggests that the main problem explaining the declining funding of NGOs is the lack of fundraising capacity amongst directors and deputy directors, who spend less than 20% of their time in accessing resources. This is exacerbated by a culture of entitlement, where NGOs feel that because of their record of accomplishment as counter hegemonic forces, they are morally entitled to donor aid, forgetting that it is often raised by the taxation of ordinary working people.

### **1.2.3 NGOs as Surrogates of the State**

"Whether by design or default, in several projects, NGOs were perceived as the primary implementing agents for state policy" (Roberts, 2002:29). In some projects, schools believed that they were better supported by projects managed by NGOs rather than by Department officials (*ibid.*). Roberts argues that this is perhaps the case because NGOs have influenced the focus and orientation of development activities, which in turn were influenced by their activities as alternative voices, promoting stakeholder involvement, "emancipatory discourse, progressivism and participatory process" (*ibid.*: 30). However, it has been argued that development programmes undertaken by NGOs through short workshop-based courses are effective in providing information and orientation to new policies "inspiring and planning individual and institutional change, and developing management systems" (Taylor, 2002:15). Taylor argues that this form of in-service training (INSET) is a very weak intervention in building the deep knowledge structures and professional ethos required for the long-term qualitative improvement of teaching and learning. In the Joint Education Trust's (JET) review of twelve school reform projects, it was revealed that considerable time, effort and financial resources have been committed to improving schools, but the results and return on investment has been disappointing (Roberts, 2002: 30).

It has been suggested that NGO-initiated school reform programmes have a subordinate role to play in the greater scheme of things: at best, they should aim to assist national and provincial departments of education to achieve their policy imperatives (Taylor, 2002:17). Taylor adds that, currently, the majority of these NGO initiatives operate on an inside-out mode, focussing on support measures, the impact of which is undermined in the absence of accountability frameworks. He contends that the integration of supply and demand mechanisms can only be effectively achieved once government takes charge and directs the resources offered by the non-government sector, within the framework of public policy: "A major factor inhibiting such coordination is the absence of the management technology required to systematically plan, implement, monitor and support this kind of activity in the public sector" (Taylor, 2002:17)

In another counterpoint to conventional assertions about the efficiency and effectiveness of NGOs, Watson, (2000, in Kraak, 2001:144) identifies a range of impediments to organisational capacity. Of particular concern was the lack of creative dynamic and visionary leaders (directors, board members, managers); a lack of effective and long term planning; a lack of effective monitoring, evaluation and reporting systems to track progress; low levels of commitment; the prevalence of a "victim" mentality; the lack of fundraising skills and the loss of skilled staff, particularly to government. In some instances, the dubious quality of NGO programmes has threatened their legitimacy. Motala & Husy (2001) add that there are inherent limitations to NGO involvement in service delivery, particularly with regard to their localised focus, the lack of uniformity of approach, a lack of coordination leading to the fragmentation and duplication in delivery, and the inability of NGOs to guarantee continuity of their inputs (p81). Another crucial dimension includes the implications of adopting a collaborative relationship with the state. The potential for subversion of the NGO mission is always present, diverting the NGO from its original development mission and core function, as well as constraining its capacity for responding creatively to development challenges. While the need for a vibrant NGO sector is perhaps more crucial today than ever before (to consolidate the gains of democracy), an increasing number of these organisations submit to the ravages of fiscal and other constraints, bringing into question their continued relevance in the development arena. Christiansen et al. (2000) of INTERFUND observe that:

*Attitudinal/bureaucratic obstacles - an "us and them" syndrome was found to be prevalent in government and the voluntary sector, manifesting itself as mistrust, suspicion and stonewalling. Some government departments questioned the motives behind NPOs' desire to interact with government. It was generally felt that NPOs wanted to sit on two chairs at the same time: delivering services to or for government, while retaining their independence to advocate and lobby. NPOs felt that they were often unable to assert themselves in negotiations because the power balance was skewed in favour of government; that their work was undervalued; and that government in general did not take them seriously.*

These trends prompt the question of the nature and continuing role of voluntary developmental organisations. NGOs are juggling potentially conflicting roles as "watchdogs" of government policy and practice on the one hand, and "welfarist" delivery agents for government on the other. Other fundamental questions included the nature of voluntary sector organisations, and the possible adoption by NGOs of more business-like

structures and systems to improve their financial circumstances and their potential for influencing policy-making (see Christiansen et. al. 2000).

The above discussion has attempted to provide a snapshot of the NGO sector up to the period 2001 as best as can be elicited in the very limited literature. The veracity of these images remains questionable, as there is a dearth of sound comparative empirical data and dedicated research on the non-profit sector against which new findings could be tested or validated (Kraak, 2001). The above claims, in the words of Kraak, may amount to “a collection of untested-self perpetuating myths and received wisdom that have acquired a life of their own”. Kraak adds that what we know about the sector is “cobbled together from outdated studies lacking in common methodological approaches...and may have reinforced confusion about the state of the sector” (ibid.: 130). Furthermore, the paucity of empirical research, and the persistence of knowledge gaps about the sector impacts on effective policy formulation for it. This, coupled with concerns about the longer term sustainability of the sector, the difficult legislative and fiscal context in which the sector operates, the apparently deteriorating relationship with the government and the alleged lack of organisational capacity in many NGOs, provides a compelling reason for research into the sector in an attempt to gain some insight into organisational behaviour and identity. However, the sheer enormity of the sector is a sobering reminder of the complexity of the task. Data generated in a collaborative project between the John Hopkins University and the Graduate School of Public & Management Development at the University of the Witwatersrand provides some indication of the challenge for any research project. Initial findings indicate that there are more than 100,000 NPOs in South Africa, which includes NGOs and CBOs. Most are voluntary associations but a significant number are Section 21 (c) companies or trusts. The sector employs just over half a million people, generating an income in excess of R10 billion per year (see Kraak, 2001). Capacity, performance, effectiveness, credibility and legitimacy are extremely uneven across the sector, making any kind of generalization extremely difficult. What is needed is a coordinated, large scale, multi-site, mixed mode evaluation study funded by one or more of the larger international donor communities in collaboration with the corporate sector and the NGO coalition. However, donor communities, particularly those from Western Europe, are notoriously insular in their approach to funding, and collaboration between donor countries is rare, making it imperative for the state to play a more active coordinating role.

#### **1.2.4 Illuminating the Identity of the English Language Education Trust (ELET)**

It is in this spirit of evaluation that I attempt to gain illuminative understanding of one of South Africa's more influential NGOs, and one that continues to serve the language development needs in South Africa. ELET was conceived in 1984 in response to the dire need for professional development in language teaching. Its teacher development programmes, which are aimed primarily at practitioners in English L2 contexts, focus on influencing the methodological and curricular practices at primary and secondary schools in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), Northern Province, Mpumalanga, and the Eastern Cape in South Africa. Using Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) as the preferred language teaching / learning methodology, the programme develops communicative competence amongst practitioners and learners (see Littlewood, 1981; Hymes, 1972; Richards & Rodgers, 1986). The study examines, through the eyes of its director, Mervin



Ogle, and other members of the organisation, the competing influences that have shaped the identity of ELET during the period 1984 to 2001. The focus here is to explore, (given the dynamic political, economic and pedagogic conditions, as well as the changing funding imperatives of the democratic Government, and the rapidly shifting policy arena), how ELET has redefined its role, re-engineered its programmes, responded strategically to emerging changes, and survived, at a time when a large cohort of language NGOs have died untimely deaths.

### 1.3 Critical Questions

#### **i) What influences shape the mutating identity of a language development NGO in a transitional democracy?**

South Africa under apartheid had a large number of NGOs, particularly educational ones, providing relief from some of the deprivations of the system, and seeking alternatives, even though these were systematically repressed and harassed. Many accumulated experience over the decades in developing and implementing alternative curricula, materials and support across the spectrum of school, adult and distance education. The transition to a new democratic state, and the transition from over-generously funded NGOs to bilateral funding primarily to the state, resulted in a massive loss of capacity in NGOs, without any systematic or corresponding growth in the capacity of the state. Ironically, while NGO leadership in the pre-1994 era were enemies of the state, in the post-1994 era, the NGO leadership was plundered by the state during the elections, undermining their capacity to deliver. The democratic state's fetish with policy development resulted in the NGO movement being marginalized while many others, now with reduced leadership capacity, failed to respond strategically to the new challenges of a rapidly evolving policy environment.

However, apart from the more obvious influences that have crafted the identity of NGOs since 1994, more especially those associated with funding, the fate of the NGO is somewhat puzzling, since many of them were in the forefront of policy development in the pre-1994 era, and could have fast-tracked the reconstruction processes. The language in education policy is a case in point. The state's advocacy of multilingualism has its roots in the NGO movement. While the state has instituted a sophisticated language policy, it clearly lacks even the most rudimentary capacity to institute desperately needed teacher development. Consequently, policy remains at the level of rhetoric while practitioners are left to their own devices. Marginalized, beleaguered NGOs, faced with the prospect of demise, have resorted to survival strategies by identifying niche activities (sometimes unrelated to their area of expertise). How this will impact on language development remains to be seen. Other influences, such as the donor community's structural adjustment programme and its desire to strengthen the hand of the state, means that the NGO's importance (in the eyes of the donor community) does not resonate with its perception of itself as a significant force in civil society. There are, however, NGOs that are contracted to provincial governments for development initiatives. Ironically, the NGO movement, which was once strategically poised as a watchdog over government policy and the translation thereof, now finds itself in partnership with the state. Is the NGO movement guilty of subverting the project of reconstruction by allowing itself to be co-opted by the state? Should the NGO movement remain aloof, representing the moral

voice of civil society, or is this a naïve expectation that is anomalous with the spirit of a new democracy? Should the NGO in fact abandon its mission of being the critical voice and redirect its energies to strengthening the hand of the state? It is hoped that this study will illuminate answers to these and other critical issues.

## **ii) What contribution has ELET made in the field of language teacher professional development?**

South Africa is reputed to have had one of the most repressive language-in-education policies on the continent. Serving as one of the pillars of apartheid, language development in general, and language teacher development in particular, remained at the margins of education policy until the mid-nineteen seventies, when the notorious Soweto riots<sup>6</sup> highlighted the draconian language policy that was designed to disenfranchise the majority. However, there was little tangible progress towards liberalising the language policy, at least until the installation of a democratic government in the mid-nineteen nineties. During this 'twilight' period, the sublime indifference of the state prompted NGOs, supported by foreign donors and local corporate business, to institute compensatory programmes to equip teachers with skills to teach English as a second, third, and sometimes as a foreign language. This was undertaken without systemic support from the education ministries. Given this context, the study seeks to appraise the contribution of NGOs like ELET in providing alternative access to professional development.

## **1.4 Tracking the Terrain of Language Teaching**

The period surveyed in this study, (mid- 1970s to present) mirrors my own biography as an English language educator, which spans more than two decades in different contexts. Serving various institutions as a language practitioner, my experiences range from teaching in secondary schools, providing voluntary service in NGOs, lecturing in University Teacher Education programmes, serving on the executive committees of a Teacher Association and editing a journal<sup>7</sup>. My changing roles have exposed me to a myriad of experiences in the teaching and learning of English, all of which affirm Tollefson's (1991:8 in Heugh, 1995:45) view that "Language in Education does not simply reflect inequalities, it produces them".

I was initiated into the terrain of language teaching during the mid-1970s, a period when language teaching was typified by an amalgam of the grammar translation and the audio-lingual approaches. My apprenticeship was characterised by active resistance to the conservative structuralist mode of language teaching / learning which valued accuracy over fluency. Despite some attempts by the then racially segregated Departments of Education to liberalise the curriculum, the dominant mode of practice continued to be modelled on the structuralist preoccupation with the mastery of grammatical structures. During the eighties and beyond, although the whole language approach began to exert

<sup>6</sup> In a revolt against the apartheid government's plan to legislate Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in secondary school, students throughout the country engaged in violent protests, sparked by the killing of a youth in the Johannesburg Township of Soweto.

<sup>7</sup> I served as Associate Editor of "REACH", a journal for teachers of English in Multi-lingual contexts and as managing editor of "Perspectives in Education": an international journal of education.

some influence in shaping the language-learning classroom, the practice in classrooms remained firmly rooted in the structuralist mode. The emergence of new theories of teaching English (Marxist, feminist, post-structuralist) seemed to be ignored (Orkin, M, 1987:10). It is hardly surprising, therefore, that ELT based on Eurocentric models “qualify the few and disqualify the many”. Phillipson (1998:350 in Heugh, 1995:46) ascribes the failure of English Language Teaching (ELT) to the presence of covert linguisticism, which ensures that the majority of children in third world countries get little benefit from schooling.

Up to the mid-1990s, language curriculum reform at secondary school level remained relatively static. Although the introduction of the “core syllabus” in the 1980s affirmed a more pragmatic approach to language use, it failed to de-ritualise language learning, particularly in L2 classrooms. In the late 1980s, classrooms began to develop a more multilingual profile with the admission of non-native speakers of English. However, these classes continued to be regarded as monolingual, and the acquisition of an elite standard the preferred target (see Agnihotri, 1995:4). While the dominant discourse of official curriculum policy in the 1990s espouses a communicative language focus, the language teaching practices in secondary schools, as I have come to witness them, reveal startling incongruities in relation to the rhetoric of espoused policy.

The dissonance between espoused policy and practice should hardly be surprising though, given the derisory attempts by successive education ministries to institute earnest development programmes. Consequently, the only visible development was located in the unstable NGO arena. While the provision of state sponsored in-service (INSET) education had virtually disappeared in the 1990s, those institutions that did provide INSET were described by the National Teacher Education Audit as offering courses which:

*are of poor academic quality and show little understanding of the realities of South African schools or concern to improve teaching competence. There is little integration of theory and practice. Thus, these courses are unlikely to lead to improved classroom practice (Hofmeyer & Hall, 1996:53).*

NGOs, on the other hand, are described in the Audit as being:

*flexible and innovative and work closely with their client communities and therefore well placed to ascertain needs....as such they provide early warning of changing INSET needs. At the same time, in their attempts to develop innovative solutions to curricular and pedagogical problems, NGO's can run ahead of teacher's abilities to relate these innovations to everyday demands of their classrooms (ibid.: 57).*

However, academics and evaluators do not share this view of NGO quality: Gultig (1998:226) criticising NGO's as being ineffective. The 1994 *Implementation Plan for Education and Training: Teacher Development and Support* suggests that while South Africa was a heavily in-serviced country, very few studies have demonstrated a positive correlation between these INSET activities and educational quality (ibid.: 227). In his “true confessions of a hardened evaluator”, Jansen (1996:1) endorses this view, suggesting that NGO INSET programmes “[do] not produce significant learning gains in the classroom”. Jansen argues that the underlying reasons for this state of affairs “can be



traced to the doorstep of both teacher development programmes and evaluation studies” (ibid.:1) [emphasis his]. He adds that while teacher development programmes have serious design flaws, evaluation studies have operated as if these flaws did not exist. He recommends both a reconceptualisation of teacher development and a corresponding re-design of evaluation. It is in this context that I endeavour to conduct an evaluation of ELET (one of the more influential language NGOs in the country), using a reconceptualised evaluation methodology.

## Section B: Language Teaching Through the Ages

### 1.5. Introduction

The need for an investigation into the pedagogy and practices of language development NGOs is especially appropriate when one considers the relatively limited experience of language curriculum reform in South Africa, in relation to international trends in language teaching, as is evidenced in TESOL<sup>8</sup> publications. Over the past two decades, at least, research into language learning and teaching, particularly in the USA, UK and Canada, have progressively eroded conventional borders of curriculum and methodology, resulting in the established canon of language teaching being transgressed in many contexts, particularly in those which cater for significant numbers of non-native speakers of the target language. In South African schools, the established canon (at least up to the early 90's as I had experienced it as a secondary school teacher) had remained largely entrenched, primarily because of the absence of systemic support from curriculum units and subject advisory services. Arguably, it was the NGO sector that attempted to fill the void in language development, especially in the pre-1994 era. Significantly, in the post-1994 era, the role of the language NGO was subverted as a result of the state's reluctance to actively sponsor and support its development initiatives, forcing many successful organisations such as READ and MOLTENO to become private-for-profit companies.

Rather than tap into the potentially valuable national resource these organisations offered, the new democratic government squandered an opportunity to appropriate the expertise of these established organisations (many of which had developed sophisticated infrastructures). Consequently, the identity of the NGO began to transmute in response to changing economic, political and, in some instances, pedagogic imperatives. An example of this is the strategic shifts in ELET's programme offerings, focussing now on social and community development programmes, such as its Project for Health and Sanitation Education (PHASE) and Primary English Teaching in Rural Areas (PETRA) (see Samuel et al., 1998: 396, 402). Both these programmes are resonate with NGO thinking internationally, namely that empowering women and rural groups can only come about by developing local literacies through participatory rural action (PRA) (Watson: 1997). This approach, based on the Regenerated Frerian Literacy through Empowerment Community Techniques (REFLECT) has enjoyed success in El Salvador, Uganda, and Bangladesh (Cottingham, 1996 in Watson, 1997:7). While not abandoning its mission of being a language service provider, we see in this shift an attempt by ELET to tap into the opportunities offered by a society in transition, and an attempt to procure its survival in a volatile NGO climate. This study documents the trajectory of change experienced by this language NGO and the competing influences that have shaped its identity.

I have selected ELET as the site of this study for several reasons, foremost being that it is regarded as one of the leading language NGOs in the KZN province. It has the reputation of providing relevant and timely intervention programmes for teachers in multicultural contexts. Of particular interest is that, while many large and influential language NGO's

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<sup>8</sup> TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages) is an international Journal of Language Education. TESOL captures contemporary dialogues and discourses in language education policy and practice internationally.

have collapsed, ELET has expanded its delivery to learning centres in other provinces. Why this is so, despite radical cuts in donor funding, is a phenomenon that should be of interest to the language education community as well as the NGO sector and funding agencies<sup>9</sup>.

As a former graduate of one of ELET's professional development programmes, I have been enriched by the experience and can acknowledge its impact on my professional life. Whether this is true of the experiences of other graduates of ELET's programmes is arguable, especially if one takes seriously the contention that NGO programmes are "ineffective" (Gultig, 1998:227). The evaluation exercise could help challenge or affirm this assertion. It could serve to make public an example of "best practice" in language development, or conversely, it could reveal to the institution inadequacies and deficiencies in its programmes. This goal resonates with the spirit of empowerment evaluation, giving the study a pragmatic focus, and simultaneously contributing substantively to the literature in this grossly under researched field in language development.

I also hope, through the course of this research, to extend the theoretical boundaries of, among others, the following:

- 1 the role and status of NGOs as transformational educational agents in a changing society; and
- 2 the changing identity of language teaching in multilingual contexts, in relation to the international experience;

Central to any Evaluation Research study are assumptions about the institution being observed and the programme under evaluation. The following assumptions are explored:

- 1 The changing character of the English language NGO reflects, and is influenced by dominant structural changes in the political and economic domains, rather than by pedagogic imperatives.
- 2 The above changes necessitate reconfiguring the role and identity of the NGO, from that of a language service provider, to one that responds to allied opportunities offered by a society in democratic transition.

Borrowing from the traditions of illuminative and empowerment evaluation (to be discussed in detail in chapter 2), this research seeks to explore the validity of the above assumptions, which relate to the dynamic and transitory character of language NGOs in the post-apartheid era, in particular the shifting identity of the ELET during the period 1984 to 2001.

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<sup>9</sup> At the commencement of data collection for this study, ELET had expanded its delivery of teacher development programmes from its original focus on KZN province to other provinces in the country through collaboration with universities. As the data collection progressed, less profitable courses were excised while reduced funding resulted in a significant degree of rationalisation and restructuring which continues to date.

## 1.6. Excavating the Identity of the English Language:

### 1.6.1 The Purist Legacy

In pursuance of the purist literary tradition engendered by a pervasive colonial influence, the English language classroom has, throughout the colonies, over the past two centuries, resembled the grammar schools of the UK. Crafted on the Structuralist mode, the teaching – learning experience was ritualistic, and formulaic, valuing the mastery of grammatical structures as the only legitimate goal of language learning. In pursuit of accuracy in language use, the English teacher, using predominantly the audio-lingual approach, inducted mini English men and women into the grand English traditions and culture. So powerful was its influence that by the turn of the twenty-first century, virtually no country on the globe had eluded the English influence. South Africa, like many other African states, is a beneficiary of this pervasive English orthodoxy.

The English teacher, or the “teacher of English” as some practitioners would insist on being called today, is a relatively new phenomenon with roots in the “new orthodoxy” of English teaching, which sought to challenge the English schoolmaster’s fetish with linguistic purism. Finding little value in grammatical correctness as the precondition for effective teaching, the emergent redefinition of the English teacher can be traced (symbolically, at least) to the Newbolt Report<sup>10</sup> of the 1920’s (Brindley, 1995:6). Brindley suggests that the frontiers of English teaching were pushed to “invest the newly minted subject with the resonance of ‘Englishness’, defined through the English language and supremely through the heritage of English literature” (ibid.:7).

This heritage of literary studies has for several decades enjoyed a prominent role in secondary level language teaching/learning contexts beyond English borders. Consequently, language education as a component of initial teacher education, as well as continuing teacher education curricula, affirms literary studies as a necessary if not vital component of language learning. While post-structuralist, post-colonial and more recently, post-apartheid discourses have consistently challenged the Euro-centric model of literary studies and its contextual inappropriateness, the English model of Literary studies continues to dominate as the canon that frames language learning and teaching. That literary studies is a reflection of life itself, and therefore earns its place as a legitimate vehicle for acquiring a language, is a truism which will not be explored in any significant degree in this study. However, if it is accepted, as a truism, that literary studies is a reflection of life itself, the pertinent question to be asked is: Whose life is reflected and foregrounded in the narratives that constitute much of contemporary literary studies in South Africa? It is my contention that, despite the apparent liberalisation of literary studies, which purport to have embraced critical theory in the teaching of literary studies, the majority of South African schools continue to model their teaching on the formulaic canon of literary studies. This phenomenon is, in itself, hardly a compelling cause for empirical enquiry, since over the years a multitude of studies has explored this issue *ad nauseam*. Of interest to me, however, is how protracted exposure to a particular brand of literary studies influences the identity of both learners and

<sup>10</sup> The Newbolt Report entitled “The Teaching of English in England”, attempted to define English as a way that demanded the specialisation of the English teacher, and elevated the teaching of English to a fine art. While thin on specific details on how these aims could be attained, it did signal a model of English teaching that was formative.

teachers. While such an exploration falls outside the scope of this study, a central concern is whether ELET has transcended the narrow conception of literacy implicit in traditional literary studies.

### 1.6.2 Literary Studies, Cultural Capital and symbolic Violence

Peter Griffith (1994:37), using Bourdieu's theoretical framework, attempts to examine the practice of literature teaching in schools. Bourdieu emphasises the relative autonomy of various cultural fields, the literary and the educational being two. Yet in the course of literature teaching in schools, Griffith argues, features of both are co-present, and the autonomy of the educational field in respect of the political is not so much relative as minimal. The validating of certain works, and the construction of a canon by means of them is a process of exclusion more than of inclusion and is one that "through its concealing of its power relations even from itself under the guise of aesthetic judgement, carries what Bourdieu terms an act of symbolic violence" (ibid.:37). "All pedagogic action is, objectively, symbolic violence insofar as it is the imposition of a culture by an arbitrary power" (Bourdieu, 1977 in Griffith, 1994). Bourdieu argues that social reality consists not merely of fields of force in which individuals are "best vectors of supra-individual forces" (Griffith, 1994:37) with the field populated by actors, each of whom undertakes behaviour that, at a conscious or unconscious level, is judged to optimise the actor's position within the field. Thus, Griffith argues, actors within a specific cultural field trade on their cultural capital in order to maximise it. The currency with which trading takes place is specific to each field and the literary field is in some ways "the inverse of the economic in that the more *recherché* the product – the more esteem accrues to the producer" (ibid.: 37).

Griffith argues that in order to start trading one needs to have the disposition to trade and some idea of how to gain access to the stock exchange. This disposition is what Bourdieu refers to as the *habitus*, a set of assumptions and attitudes with which each individual is endowed by early formative experiences. The *habitus*, once formed, remains an enduring feature of an individual's life. Thus the teaching of a small canon, or even some part of it, can generate patterns of taste in a constellation of related areas. Thus, Griffiths argues, it can be expected that there will be a correlation between those discouraged from attending theatre by their experience as teenagers studying Shakespeare, and the tendency on the part of some people to avoid art galleries in their future lives as a consequence of some disconcerting experience in the art class. However, this is not to suggest that the canonical rendering of texts in the classroom has a totalising impact on learners. Both teachers and learners are capable of subversive interpretation of texts. Bourdieu suggests that it is possible to get beyond the dominant mode of thought and expression by engaging texts in non-conventional ways. Engaging a text in this way has the effect of "rendering it incongruous or even absurd, simply by making it perceptible as the arbitrary convention it is" (Bourdieu, 1993:13 in Griffith, 1994:41). The mandatory study of Shakespearean drama in schools is an example of a powerful and determined intervention by the state in the educational process (see Orkin, 1987). However, the selection of such palpable texts that permit multiple interpretations and subversive reinterpretations constitutes a powerful irony, particularly since these texts lend themselves so readily to the generation of alternative meanings.<sup>11</sup> A more significant

<sup>11</sup> For an incisive analysis of literary studies as a form of cultural capital, see "Art made Tongue Tied By Authority" in "Who Owns English" (1994)



irony, however, is that in many South African schools, teachers, as I have observed them, squander the opportunity of transcending textual rituals. They do this by allowing a limited set of "alternative meanings" to become ritualised and canonised as uniform practice, as learners are coerced into believing that the meaning resides in the text. This is equally true of the study of Shakespeare as it is of the study of the more fashionable and "contextually relevant" contemporary genre. Why this persists in South Africa after several decades of international curriculum reform is intriguing.

Another characteristic of English language teaching practices is the disproportionate value ascribed to writing as a form of representation. Even more pernicious is that the majority of classrooms in South Africa value writing in *English* as the ultimate goal of language acquisition. Social Anthropologists have long focussed on the creation and recreation of identities through written cultural products. In exploring the relationship between literature and social reality, they have argued that the literary product is not only a substantive part of the real world, but also a key element in the configuration of the world itself.<sup>12</sup> While the written text is only a very limited means of exploring social reality and identity, this form of representation has been privileged as the dominant genre of representation in most educational contexts. In my experience with curriculum development in the North Durban region, I have observed the preponderance of writing as a preferred mode of representation. Little attempt is made to explore alternative modes of presentation and representation, even though language teaching in multilingual contexts necessitates the affirmation of multiple intelligences and learning styles through multi-modal representation.

This imperative for multilingual language-learning contexts, particularly when speakers translate from one language to another or mediate between standard and non-standard forms, is avoided under an illusory notion that affirming alternative modes is a perversion of the "standard" form of the language. We acknowledge that language and original thought do not always fully correlate since the gap between the arbitrary sign and what an individual actually intends to communicate becomes far more formidable (see Harrison & Marbach, 1994:48). That the notion of a "standard" form of the English language could survive in South Africa after decades of post-colonial and anti-colonial agitation is not at all surprising, given the preponderance of texts and teaching materials that are rooted in the purist English tradition. What is interesting is a reawakening of the vestiges of colonial influence in the recently established democratic state. The obsessive hankering of non-native speakers of the English language for a brand of the language that resembles the standard variety represents the quest for a rare commodity that has to be appropriated as the most powerful vehicle for access into the marketplace<sup>13</sup>. This phenomenon is demonstrated in the mass exodus of non-native speakers of English to schools that are perceived to offer greater economic and cultural capital by their continued use of English as the predominant medium of instruction.

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<sup>12</sup> Michael Meeker (in Archetti, 1994) explores the relationship between identity and literature in a study on "Oral culture, media culture, and the Islamic resurgence in Turkey".

<sup>13</sup> See "Empowerment in the Language Classroom" (Dhunpath, R, 1994) for a critique of language and power in South African Schools.

William Downes (1994), in “Language in society”, explores the established canon among conservative linguistics to develop an empirical theory, which could predict and explain variability in language use, variability frequently being associated with systematic degeneration of language. Such use of natural science approaches in explaining linguistic phenomena characterised the early work of linguists such as Chomsky, (1965, 1980), Labov (1972), Hymes (1972) and Gumphez (1972), whose preoccupation was to explain whether or not the regularities which are exhibited by social behaviour can be explained using the empirical model suggested by Popper (1957)<sup>14</sup>. However, conventions employing the empirical model cannot, and do not, explain the principles of arbitrariness and variability, which characterise language use (see Brumfit and Roberts, 1983). Widespread disenchantment with the empirical, idealised model (in particular the Chomskyeian paradigm) generated a breakaway of many progressive linguists who sought to explain language phenomena sociolinguistically, choosing to explore the comparative binaries of competence/performance, fluency/accuracy. Embracing discourse analysis as a mode of enquiry, the emergent discipline of sociolinguistics turned its attention to those properties that required social explanation. Hence, sociolinguists brought into focus competing sociological constructs of language and race, language and culture, language and social class, language and gender and a host of other socio-cultural constructs.

This shift necessitates some attention to the question, what is language? If we return to the Chomskyeian conception, we see language as “a set of very specific universal principles which are intrinsic properties of the human mind and part of our species’ genetic endowment” (Downs, 1984:22). This conception is however severely limited and limiting. It fails to accord significance to pragmatic features of language such as varieties, dialects, typologies, pidgins, creoles, language shift and language death, as well as a kaleidoscope of other overt and covert linguistic phenomena. Therefore, to hazard a definition of “what is language?” would be an act of reductionism and oversimplification, faults which have characterised earlier work on language studies and language teaching at the philosophical, theoretical and methodological levels. For the purposes of this study therefore, language, viewed in the broadest sense, is seen as *one* of the semiotic modes that interlocutors access in the communicative process. Consistent with this broad generic conception is an awareness that the language phenomenon is a fluid, shifty, highly contested and emotive social construct (Giles & Coupland, 1991). One of the purposes in reviewing the literature in the field is, therefore, to trace the trajectory of language teaching through the past two decades, and to establish the internal logic (if such a phenomenon can be discerned) that has propelled the discipline. Another purpose is to locate language teaching in SA within the broader context of the international experience, which historically has influenced it, to establish the extent to which it has mirrored its evolution and to establish whether an NGO such as ELTE has responded to the shifts. Another compelling interest for me is how the English teacher has crafted his/her identity and how this impacts on his/her practice.

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<sup>14</sup> Karl Popper (1957) maintains that social explanations can be, with certain reservations, both theoretical and empirical.

### 1.6.3. Excavating the Identity of the Language Teacher:

#### 1.6.3.1 “What sort of animal is the English teacher”?

The 20<sup>th</sup> century saw a phenomenal range of activity in language teaching methodology. Grammar Translation, the Direct Method, Audio-Lingualism characterised the age of methods, competing for attention. Susan Brindley, in “Shaping the image of an English Teacher” (1994), asks the question: “What sort of animal is the English teacher”? This ‘animal’, ostensibly, should have meaningful literary training, a range of personal qualities including sensitivity and moral awareness, the ability to unlock creative potential, concern for the psychological wellbeing of children and the pre-disposition to change lives. This missionary-inspired conception catapulted the subject to being one of the most dramatic and significant University disciplines by the early 1930s (ibid.). The newly coined “special” subject required “special” men and women to teach its four separate components as a fine art. Universal literacy formed the core of the curriculum, with other pillars being the development of children’s self-expression, a belief in the power of English literature for moral and social growth and the full development of mind and character (see Brindley, 1994). How the English teacher would achieve these aims was not defined. The English pedagogue would “shape themselves and be shaped for the task of teaching it...(affecting) the individual and social identity of us all” (ibid.).

While calling on the subject to perform a cultural / social mission, the above conception abandoned the traditional orthodoxy of accuracy and correctness of usage, which had defined the earlier project of linguistics. Imbued with the power to challenge conventions, institutions, governments and established systems, the teaching of English was invested with the ability to seek alternative ideas, challenge received opinions and strong personal responses, and encourage the quest for democratic openness between teachers and students. What I find particularly interesting in this conception of language teaching is how closely the spirit of the new orthodoxy of English resonates with the spirit of critical theory, post-structuralism and postmodernism that is claimed to underpin contemporary conceptions of language teaching, central to which is the act of “addressing textual and linguistic cultural practices in a completely decentering and deconstructive manner” (Piem 1994:1)<sup>15</sup> (I will return to a more detailed discussion of this construct in chapters 5 and 6). In exploring the identity of English in the secondary school curriculum, Nick Piem engages in a critique of English, aiming to address the social, the cultural, and the institutional being of English through alternative practice. His project, grounded in post-structuralist theory, attempts to examine the practices of reading, writing and oracy in schooling in a “theoretically informed reading of what they are, how they work in existing, routine and institutionalised practices” (ibid.: 1). Adopting post-structuralism as a foundation enables one to interpret how signifying events, texts or practices are given fixed meanings within social practices and contexts.

Such an approach is of interest to me because of its potential to provide theoretical lenses through which to question the familiar and habitually taken-for-granted assumptions that constitute the language and how it is taught. In particular, it has the potential to explain how and why language teaching/learning practices have come to acquire a ritualised, reified status. Post-structuralism, with its scepticism of a homogeneous system of

<sup>15</sup> Nick Piem (1994) in his acclaimed text “Critical theory and the English Teacher” provides an excellent insight into how discourse theory, psychoanalysis, semiotics and deconstruction can be used to redefine English teaching.



knowledge, insists that knowledge and understandings are always positioned, and that the identity and meaning of things mutate within different social and cultural contexts (see Derrida, 1976; Foucault, 1972; Lyotard, 1984). If the post-structuralist conception of identity and meaning is to be regarded as a truism, a vital question that needs to be answered is: why has the identity of the South African English language teacher (as evidenced in his/her practice) remained relatively static, bearing an uncanny resemblance to the grammar school 'masters' of earlier generations?

Donald Freeman (1996) explores this phenomenon in a longitudinal study in which teachers recall their own language learning experiences. He suggests that teachers "acquire seemingly indelible imprints from their own experiences as students, and these imprints are tremendously difficult to shake" (Freeman, 1996: 11). He concludes that the memories of instruction gained through their "apprenticeship of observation" (ibid) function as *de-facto* guides for teachers. (see also Kathleen Bailey, 1996; Bret Berthold, 1996; Belinda Braunstein, 1996; Jennifer Tauman, 1996; and J Zambo, 1996; whose researches corroborate Donald Freeman's theory.) Interestingly, this phenomenon is not confined to the English language classroom, but applies equally to Spanish and Japanese contexts as Gloria Almara and Amy Tsui (1996) have concluded through their research.

What then are the implications for the evolution of language teaching if teachers' recycling rituals, which seldom have any discernible pedagogic rationale, persistently mediate the success of teacher education programmes? Connelly and Clandinin (2000) take the view that "what teachers *do*, reflects their knowledge, indeed, *is* their knowledge" (ibid.: 89). They make a distinction between *knowledge for teachers* and *teacher knowledge*, suggesting that teachers' practice is knowledge in action. Teachers hold knowledge that comes from experience, is learned in context and is expressed in practice. Using the Deweyan conception of knowledge, Connelly and Clandinin argue that *knowledge* and *knowing* are dialectical combinations of subject and object and of the cultural and individual:

*They think of knowledge in narrative terms, and describe it in terms of narrative life constructions. The stories these narratives are built on, are both personal, reflecting a person's life history, and social, reflecting the professional knowledge contexts in which teachers live" (ibid.: 93).*

They distinguish between teachers' personal practical knowledge and teachers' professional knowledge landscape. The professional knowledge landscape is characterised by the "funnelling"<sup>16</sup> of policy into different schools at variable rates. The teacher, bombarded with a plethora of policies (local, regional and national), experiences a tension between what is funnelled into the landscape and what s/he is expected to do with it. In a sense, this translates to a tension between theory and practice. This, argues Connelly and Clandinin, is the "fundamental epistemological dilemma" (ibid.: 97): They are expected to know things theoretically while, at the same time, their job is to know things practically. The tension arises because the practical knowledge is expected to be theoretically driven knowledge.

<sup>16</sup> Clandinin & Connelly (1995) use the image of a funnel to describe the pouring of policy into schools by the school boards, the Department and the Government, depending on the board purposes, the school purposes and other agendas.

The universality and taken for grantedness of theory and the supremacy of theory over practice gives theory the quality of what Crites (1971, in Connelley & Clandinin, 2000), calls a “*sacred*” story, in which teachers’ professional knowledge is imbedded as a sacred narrative. These thoughts on teacher knowledge have consequences for teacher education and, in particular, language education. A teacher education programme should begin with an attempt to excavate the knowledge students bring with them as pre-service teachers, rather than adopting a purist theoretical perspective of what they ought to know. The linguistic identities and biographies of pre-service educators should provide valuable signposts and insights into the pre-existing landscapes of sacred knowledges, which act as potential filters to new learnings. Likewise, the biographies of in-service language practitioners should provide profound insights into how these sacred knowledges are mediated by contextual realities and how the identity of the language teacher is sculpted.

### 1. 6.3.2 The Post-modern Language teacher...An evolved animal?

The delicate and nebulous phenomenon of identity and the role of language in shaping it is the focus of much attention internationally. Lynne Diaz-Rico argues that as the English language is elevated to the status of a universal commodity, teaching tools that served us in the modern era can still handcraft language acquisition, but new post-modern tools await us, tools that give us the power to see with a new depth of vision. She suggests that the power resides in four domains: “post-modern concepts of identity, post-modern deployment of technologies of knowledge, post-modern insight into institutional coercion, and the post-modern vision of the English language itself” (Diaz-Rico, 1999: 19). As debates on culture transgress conventional borders towards post-cultural constructivism, and as we realise that identity is flexible, multiple and extended, we create second identities for ourselves in the second language and accept our own creative duplicity as a necessary condition for language and knowledge acquisition (ibid.). This post-modern conception of language teaching is challenged by Ronald Carter in Hayhoe & Parker, (1994: 16), who contend that this relativistic view of language acquisition is essentially a romantic doctrine which accepts as valid the language that children produce simply because it is theirs and therefore part of *their* individual, social and cultural identity. They argue further that there is a real danger in refusing to accept criticism from the right, that there has been an “undue and uncritical emphasis on what children already know and bring to school rather than on what they do not know, cannot do or what the school can bring to them” (ibid.: 16). This relativistic romanticism has spawned another faddish phenomenon prevalent in many language classrooms: the dismissal of language teaching approaches that focus on accuracy of linguistic structures as being “transmissive and authoritarian” (ibid.: 15), and therefore inappropriate. It would be inaccurate and disempowering for learners to perceive of written and spoken language as two distinct and wholly different systems, *since* there is a core of grammatical features [common to both media] that is essential for proficiency and coherent communication.

Is the development of a basket of core linguistic skills, which forms the basis of a literate culture, sufficiently privileged, or is the language curriculum redolent of romantic ideas where the development of the imagination is elevated as crucial? Dart (2001), in her study poignantly entitled: “Literacy and the lost world of the imagination”, concludes that, paradoxically, developing the imagination which has been “sidelined” is no longer seen as a pedagogic concern. National curriculum requirements (in the UK context at

least), conceive of language teaching as the acquisition of a series of discrete skills. The occlusion of innovative and creative approaches to language teaching, she contends, is blamed on the debilitating influence of the media on language literacy.

Concepts such as constructivism, innovation and creativity carry an inherent potential for nihilism, to a point where laissez faire indulgences become legitimated under the banner of post-modernism. This certainly was the experience when Paulo Freire's (1972) pedagogy of the oppressed (critical pedagogy) was popularised with equal fervour in lecture theatres and strip-tease clubs. As Critical pedagogy was subjected to interpretation by scholars and re-interpretation by those interpreting the interpretations (without a reading of the original work), the complex and profound teachings of Freire and Giroux were reduced to "classroom orgies" where group work became synonymous with, and equal to, critical pedagogy. A new form of "banking" began to replace the original practice of language teaching: Systematic, disciplined teaching methodologies were banked away, and a new coinage of refrain emerged: the systematic teaching of grammatical structures is not necessary because it impedes language acquisition. What then *does* constitute critical pedagogy? It is an approach to teaching and curriculum, informed by critical social theory that "seeks to understand and critique the socio-political practices that aim not only to change the nature of schooling, but also the wider society" (Pennycook, 1990b: 24 in Cookes & Lehner, 1998:319). Freire (1970) distinguishes between 'banking education', which occurs when teachers attempt to transfer the contents of their minds to those of learners, and 'transformative education' which develops when education proceeds by means of dialogue between teacher and learner concerning real world issues with the intention of acting on the world in order to improve it, and in the process, supports students' political and personal development (ibid.: 320). What is the potential for critical pedagogy in English language teaching?

### 1.6.3.3 Critical Pedagogy in English as a Second Language (ESL)

Critical pedagogy begins with that "the basic assumption that the human vocation is to take action which changes the world for the improvement of life conditions" (Crawford, 1978:2 in Crookes & Lehner: 320). Critical pedagogy focuses on the simultaneous goals of developing English communicative abilities and the ability to apply them to the development of a critical awareness. Crawford, (1978 in ibid.: 320,321) lists ten principles for what characterises a critical pedagogy ESL class:

1. The purpose of education is to develop critical thinking by presenting students' situations to them as problems so that they can perceive, reflect, and act on them.
2. The content of curriculum derives from the life situation of the learners as expressed in the themes of their reality.
3. Dialogue forms the content of the educational situation.
4. The organisation of curriculum recognises the class as a social entity and resource.
5. The learners produce their own learning materials.
6. The task of planning is, first, to organise generative themes, and second, to organise subject matter as it relates to those themes.
7. The teacher participates as a learner amongst learners.
8. Teachers contribute their ideas, experiences, opinions, and perceptions to the

dialogical process.

9. The teacher's function is one of posing problems.
10. The students possess the right and power to make decisions.

Under the banner of critical pedagogy, it is appropriate, even ethical for ESL/EFL teachers to focus on important course themes such as peace education, environmental concerns, conflict resolution, literature and critical thinking (Jones, 1998: 338). This includes arriving at consensus on which activities learners might possibly enjoy, which are most effective and which would provide learners with skills that they could use for academic and communicative purposes (see Barkhuizen, 1998: 85). In South Africa, which prides itself on its peaceful revolution to democracy, it is interesting to note that "learners are never asked in any overt systematic way about their language learning experiences" (ibid.: 85). Reflecting on the dominant trends in "TESOL at Twenty-Five", Douglas Brown (1991) identifies the major domains that have characterised research into L2 teaching/learning:

- *Who* are the learners that we are teaching? (a focus on the learner from a psychological viewpoint). Why are they learning English?
- *Where* is English Teaching taking place and what effects do geographical differences have on our teaching?
- *What* are we teaching (i.e. are we teaching structures, functions and notions, or are we teaching content, tasks and processes?)
- *How* are we teaching English? (focus on method): What methodological approaches characterise our classrooms?

Each of the above domains explores the major preoccupations in the two decades up to the early 1990s. The purpose of this exercise is to locate L2 research within the broader theoretical, philosophical, and methodological domains of this period.

This overview has attempted to sketch the dominant trends in language teaching over the past decade. In the predominantly English speaking nations such as the UK, the USA and Canada, English language teaching has evolved significantly, responding to the changing demographics, adapting teaching methodologies and technologies to address the increasing demand for proficiency in the "*lingua franca* of the world", especially from non-native speakers. Despite the fact that the majority of South Africa's population are non-native speakers of English, curriculum and methodology change here has not kept pace with the international experience (see Orkin, 1987). In fact, South Africa has been a gross importer of commercially packaged curriculum and resource materials from the North, where such demand has spawned flourishing markets in English as a Second Language (ESL) materials development. This, however, has not altered the identity of the South African English classroom that continues to evince an archetypical character, while language teachers project a distinctive identity akin to the teacher of yesteryear.

It may be argued that this problem is not necessarily located in the realm of policy, but is a consequence of teachers' reluctance to abandon their entrenched modes of practice in the absence of appropriate support. The language development NGO sector in South Africa has been responsive to the need for support and has been a prolific consumer and producer of ESL materials because the dominant mode of professional teacher development of this sector is distance education. This is certainly true of ELET, which produces significant amounts of materials for its own development initiatives as well as

for other institutions. An important focus of this study is an evaluation of the materials developed by ELET, to establish whether they are modelled on imported exemplars or whether they have a distinctive character that address contextual realities.

Mikhail Bakhtin (1986) describes language as heteroglossic, comprising multiple, competing Discourses that are in dynamic dialogue with one another. It would be interesting to excavate the particular Discourses that teachers draw on in discursively constructing and “fixing” their identities into ritualistic modes of praxis. Freeman (1996 in Johnston, 1998: 681-710) alludes to teachers’ learning in terms of Discourses drawn on by teachers in talking about their teaching. Several studies using the age-and-stage model (see Huberman, 1993; Meason & Sikes, 1992) have attempted to identify and analyse these Discourses, some with illuminating results (see Huberman, 1993). However, most of these studies have been conducted in:

*...mainstream education and in relatively stable socio-political and economic contexts. In ESL teaching, which takes place in a broad range of national contexts, many of which are far from stable, such assumptions are misleading and in research terms may be counterproductive (Johnston, 1997: 685).*

In addition, such studies do not account for the historical milieu in SA, which has engendered an extremely uneven set of language learning / teaching conditions that continue to be difficult to remedy. These conditions cannot be dismissed as vestiges of colonialism, but are an amalgam of complex political and socio/cultural determinants that relegate a significant proportion of language learners to the margins, despite the invocation of liberatory slogans and ambitious legislation<sup>17</sup>. Furthermore, much of the focus of these studies has been the cognitive consequences of literacy acquisition (Street, 1995). Hence, the emphasis has been to ‘diagnose’ deficiencies in language use, with the view to ‘remedying’ them (Gee, 1990). In recent times, the focus has shifted towards the social uses literacy, giving birth to a new body of literature, broadly labelled as the “New Literacy Studies” (Street, 1989, 1993, 1995; Gee, 1989). Acknowledging the contextual nature of literacy practices, helps “bridge the disciplinary chasm between the study of language and literacy, and the study of social theory and critical pedagogy” (Gee, 1990: vii).

#### 1.6.3.4 New Literacy Studies

In an attempt to transcend the narrow conception of literacy as a neutral, technical skill, the new literacy movement has conceptualised literacy as an ideological practice with the attendant power relations and embedded cultural meanings and practices (Street, 1993, 1995). In referring to the field of literacy as a “socially contested terrain”, Gee (1990: 29), challenges the cherished dichotomies of “the primitive” and “the civilised” and between orality and literacy, moving the study of literacy from an idealised generalisation of the nature of language and literacy to the realm of the “real” (Street, 1995). Rather than reify written language, the real language approach addresses the

<sup>17</sup> See the Final Report of the Language Plan Task Group (LANGTAG): Towards a National Language Plan for South Africa (1996). The minister of Education commissioned the group to consider how “the African languages, which have been disadvantaged by the linguistic policies of the past should be developed and maintained”.



relationship between language and social change and places the literacy discourse within the broader discourses of “development politics, and educational policy” (ibid.:9). The following (brief) historical survey is intended to provide a context for the present language in education policy and its implications for language development, as well as to provide some insight into the advent of the language development NGO.

### 1.7 The National Language in Education Policy

As is the case for much of Africa, most of the language development work in SA was informed by a Eurocentric approach in which it was assumed that, as in Europe, Africa was divided into speech communities (Language Plan Task Group, {LANGTAG}, 1996). Until the 1970s, the official elaboration of most of Africa’s language consisted of a Christian terminology and a Christian Church register. With the rise in African nationalism, there was progress towards producing an elementary school vocabulary in each of the languages. However, very few languages progressed beyond this point, leaving most of them underdeveloped to date (ibid.: 71). Competing missionaries selected different varieties from the continuum of African dialects, codified them according to their own frames of reference, and developed them into separate languages. Once these ‘languages’ were codified and taught in mission schools, they took on exclusive identities, reinforced by general feelings of separateness and nationhood (evident in the variations that characterise Nguni and Sotho varieties<sup>18</sup>). Successive attempts during the years 1910 to the mid-1950s aimed at harmonising the “highly confusing orthographies” (see LANGTAG, 1996:72), proved futile, for a variety of reasons, notably because the missionaries were not trained as linguists. By 1928, it was clear that a central, more powerful, authority was needed to reduce the orthographical variety in African languages. Linguists such as Westpal (1946:54 in LANGTAG, 1996) argued that the different dialects, particularly those of Nguni and Sotho, should be unified, to prevent a possible language decline that could result from speakers of African languages being exposed to English. However, attempts at unification by the government during the period 1928 to 1951 were thwarted by resistance at the grassroots level.

By 1959, the Tomlinson Commission proposals for the expansion of “Native Trust Areas” into “Bantustans” were accepted, endorsing the principle that “the vernaculars became the defining feature of state nationalism” (LANGTAG, 1996:78). This led to the appointment of separate language boards, a process which in Misimang’s view ensured “the linguistic balkanisation of South Africa was complete” (1992b:5 in ibid.). The language boards served as the apparatus that implemented the nationalist party ideology and lead to widespread antipathy towards African languages. The unequal language in education provisions of Bantu Education under apartheid legislation was a cornerstone in the maintenance of a “separate but equal” principle, which sought to exclude the majority African population from economic and political advantage, by denying them access to the language of the marketplace: English (see Heugh, 1995). The exclusion was achieved by the imposition of mother tongue instruction as the initial medium of instruction, a move legitimated in the 1950s by the United Nations Education and Scientific Co-operation (UNESCO) report, which endorsed its support for the principle.

<sup>18</sup> Two of the major African languages in SA that developed separate identities as a result of the influence of the missionaries, which influenced their development; e.g. the missionaries who worked with the Sotho were French speaking while those who worked among the Xhosa were English speaking.

This report coincided opportunistically with the Bantu Education Act of 1963, giving the white South African government justification for the policy which was, however, "very different from that intended by UNESCO's recommendations"<sup>19</sup> (ibid.: 43).

In the years that followed, the notion of mother tongue instruction became synonymous with an impoverished curriculum that extended the initial four-year mother tongue instruction to eight years (up to grade 8). Thereafter, learners would have to be taught through the medium of Afrikaans and English on a 50-50 basis. This act, regarded by many as sparking the turning point in South Africa's political and linguistic history, inspired the Soweto uprisings of 1976 that saw resistance spread to all parts of the country.<sup>20</sup> This "exacerbated negative perceptions about African languages and their instrumental worth in Education" (ibid.: 43), while simultaneously intensifying sentiments about English as the language of the oppressor. The years that followed saw an increasing liberalisation of the language policy, particularly with the work of the National Educational Policy Initiative (NEPI, 1992), which laid the foundation for the work of LANGTAG, later to culminate in a radical but contentious language policy.<sup>21</sup> However, in a sophisticated, and to some extent successful attempt at social engineering, the language in education policy effectively separated different linguistic and ethnic African populations from one another while achieving the central goal of keeping them apart from the minority English and Afrikaans populations. How to address such linguistic racism ('linguicism'<sup>22</sup>) requires an enormous political will supported by policies promoting anti-linguicism. Phillipson (1988) suggests that attempts to *improve a model* of education will not change conditions and, consequently, attempts to improve ESL methodologies can only have superficially improved results. The transition to English programmes in South Africa are adaptations of ESL methodologies established in Britain and the USA, where the majority speak English and minorities speak languages other than English. These programmes based on the assimilationist principle attempt to bring minorities into and under the majority English speaking culture, and do

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<sup>19</sup> For an insightful historical survey of the language in education policy in SA, see Kathleen Heugh's "From unequal education to the real thing". In defence of the principle of mother tongue instruction, Heugh suggests that it is a pedagogically sound principle that has been promoted in many African countries for much of this century, and especially after the publication of the Phelps-Stokes Fund Reports on education in Africa in the 1920's.

<sup>20</sup> Heugh suggests that the act introduced two overwhelming obstacles to an already disadvantaged learner. The sudden transition to English as a medium of instruction for content subjects, when most students did not have the basic competency in English to meet the requirements of the grade five syllabuses. Further, the cognitively impoverished curriculum of the early years made it difficult for African Language pupils to cope with the demands of grade five and beyond, obstacles that English and Afrikaner learners did not have to contend with.

<sup>21</sup> The official Language policy declares South Africa as a multilingual country and accords official status to eleven official languages (Isixhosa; Sesotho; siSwati; IsiZulu; siNdebele; Afrikaans; English; JuVenda; Tsonga; Setswana; and Pedi), while "guaranteeing protection" for other minority languages. The policy remains contentious because despite its liberal intentions, it is considered by many as another example of political rhetoric, which has proven (pragmatically) impossible to enact. The consequence is that a great many South Africans remain linguistically disenfranchised.

<sup>22</sup> Linguicism according to Skutnabb-Kangas (1988, in Heugh, 1995), can be defined as ideologies and structures which are used to legitimate, effectuate and reproduce an unequal division of power and resources (both material and non-material) between groups which are defined on that basis of language (on the basis of their mother tongues).



not succeed in providing meaningful access to language or education (Heugh, 1995:45). In addition to the political determinants surveyed above that continue to perpetuate linguisticism, imported methodologies and programmes fail to take account of the socio-economic and geographical realities that necessarily impinge on development. The dilemmas and challenges of meaningful language development is poignantly articulated in the following poem by Stephen Spender who reflects on "*An elementary school classroom in a slum*":

Far far from the gusty waves these children's faces.  
Like rootless weeds, the hair torn around their pallor.  
The tall girl with her weighed-down head. The paper  
seeming boy, with rat's eyes. The stunted, unlucky heir  
Of twisted bones, reciting a father's gnarled disease  
His lesson from his desk. At back of the dim class  
One unnoted, sweet and young, His eyes live in a dream  
Of squirrel's game, in tree room other than this.

On sour cream walls, donations. Shakespeare's head,  
Cloudless at dawn, civilized dome riding all cities.  
Belled, flowery, Tyrolean valley. Open-handed map  
Awarding the world its world. And yet, for these  
Children, these windows, not this world, are world.  
Where all their future's painted with a fog,  
A narrow street sealed in with a lead sky,  
Far from rivers, capes, and stars of words.  
Surely Shakespeare is wicked, the map a bad example  
With ships and love tempting them to steal-  
For lives that slyly turn in their cramped holes  
From fog to endless night? On their slag heap, these children  
Wear skins peeped through by bones and spectacles of steel  
With mended glass, like bottle bits on stones.  
All of their time and space are foggy slum.

Unless, governor, teacher, inspector, visitor,  
This map becomes their window and these windows  
That shut upon their lives like catacombs,  
Break O break open till they break the town  
And show the children to green fields and make their world  
Run azure on gold sands, and let their tongues  
Run naked into books, the white and green leaves open  
History theirs whose language is the sun.

My intention in citing this poem, which graphically engraves the contextual reality of South African schools, is not intended to be another melodramatic tirade on the legacy of apartheid. It is intended to generate and signal a series of critical concerns that this research will take up, concerns that need to be dealt with if educators are to dream of

“showing children to green fields... gold sands, and let[ting] their tongues Run naked into books”.

Firstly, the South African Language, Literacy and Communication (LLC) curriculum proposals in the Curriculum 2005 policy documents specify the following outcomes:

- 1 Make and negotiate meaning and understanding.
- 2 Show critical awareness of language usage.
- 3 Respond to the aesthetic, effective, cultural and social values in texts.
- 4 Access, process and use information from a variety of sources and situations.
- 5 Understand, know and apply language structures and conventions in context.
- 6 Use language for learning.

The above proposals have a strong inclination towards critical literacy and the aesthetic, if not esoteric, dimensions of language use. Ironically, the policy espouses multilingualism as the grounding principle, but all documents outlining LLC are in English only and thus present semantically and culturally, an English-specific reading of the concepts, processes and intended outcomes. Perhaps it should be acknowledged that language policy needs to be responsive to the pragmatic reality that English language proficiency has hegemony in a globalised world. However, to teach and learn within this curriculum means that those involved are trapped in an “English-centric” communication process that is subtractive rather than additive with regard to primary languages (see Young, 1997). This prompts the question: In a context where the majority of learners whose first language is **not English**, and who lack basic communicative competence in the language, is it reasonable to speak about lofty idealistic expectations such as critical awareness of language use. Is this perhaps “the stuff that dreams are made on?” (Gough, 1997) Whether these idealistic commitments are intended to, or can actually be realised in practice in the classroom is quite another matter.

Secondly, the literature on language acquisition is replete with theoretical insights into the influence of the sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic domains of language, both of which ascribe significance to the milieu in which acquisition takes place (Brumfit & Roberts, 1983); the importance of contextual factors (Krashen, 1981); the effect of geographical space (Downes, 1984, Kachru, 1988); the influence of attitudes (Giles & Coupland, 1991); the impact of motivation (Gardner, 1985, Krashen, 1985); as well as a host of contributions on the value of content and the nature of the subject matter (Giroux & McLaren, 1990, Pennycook, 1989). Where the potential for language learning is contingent upon favourable environmental factors, we need to consider seriously whether any learning is possible via the medium of obtuse curriculum materials such as Romantic Poetry<sup>23</sup>, when learners are subjected to perpetual squalor and poverty. Is the Freirian notion of “local literacies” (this construct will be developed in chapter 4) a pragmatic strategy for linguistic empowerment or a systematic erosion and perversion of the established canon of language teaching / learning? Anti-pragmatists ask whether “symbolic multilingualism is a glorified tool parading as a unifying, nation-building strategy, or a ploy to further “oppress the oppressed through language liberation”? (Cele, 2000); or whether it represents a “triumph of instrumental reason” (Morrow, 2000); or whether the dilution of language skills in Curriculum 2005 through the OBE framework is guaranteed to produce a generation of “confident illiterates” (Mulholland, 1999) or

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<sup>23</sup> Romantic Poetry, the dominant literary impulse from around 1798 to 1870, emerged out of a sense of humanitarianism in response to the suffering of the masses as a consequence of the industrial revolution

whether the LLC curriculum with its transdisciplinary focus has a “nice, warm, fuzzy, ambiguity that is tolerant of linguistic oversimplification to mean oral communication at the expense of developing other productive and cognitive skills.” (Ogle, 2001).

### **1.8 Are we cultivating ‘Confident Illiterates’?**

Indeed, a critical concern is whether there should be a redefinition, in fundamental ways, of the conception of literacy, from one that privileges the acquisition of a discrete set of skills, isolated from the personal experience of the learners as well as the social issues that inform their lives; or whether the focus should be on experimenting with innovative literacy programs that serve non-traditional students in non-traditional ways, using practices supported by cognitive theory and research in second language acquisition to promote second language acquisition as a process of meaning making that links the experience of the learner to culture, language, literacy, and learning. While the literacy context in South Africa demands this kind of intervention, such programs are still the exception. In many programmes learners are expected to start with the letters of the alphabet, progress to syllables, then to words, and then create sentences made up of those words. Innovative programmes, in keeping with a communicative and social / contextual approach require a curriculum that acknowledges the existence of multiple literacies, and builds on existing literacies in tandem with an emancipatory problem-solving approach that seeks, in an active way, to raise awareness of social contexts (Wrigley, 1993). The abovementioned PHASE project offered by ELET is modelled on the “emancipatory literacy” principle, using the “action programme” approach (this will be discussed in some depth in chapter 4). To what extent this programme can be regarded as innovative and emancipatory is one of the central concerns of this research. Furthermore, the study seeks to evaluate to what extent the programme resonates with and extends the boundaries of critical pedagogy and critical literacy.

## Section C

### Methodological Imperatives

#### 1.9.1 Excavating an ‘Appropriate’ Methodology

The difficulty in evaluating innovative methodological approaches is the theoretical problem of how to provide a conceptual framework that generates insights into learners' and teachers' lives without the restrictions of inappropriate models - a further challenge for researchers like myself, who have an interest in gaining insight into the sector by credible modes of evaluation, but are constrained by limited resources. Also, how does one counterbalance this against the charge that evaluation studies in South Africa serve a bureaucratic function for funders and donors, based on self-reports by programme participants? (Jansen, 1996:3). Jansen argues that one way of resolving the dilemma of unreliable evaluation reports is to set a new standard for them, e.g., “producing the richly contextualised narratives which bring to light powerful findings on impact beyond statistical summaries” (ibid.:7). The solution, in my view, is to resist the tendency to conduct large-scale studies (which are perceived to be more reliable and valid), and focus on a single site, as I propose, and hope that the insights generated will resonate with other contexts. Inspired by the need to set a new standard in evaluation studies, the research methodology for this study is influenced by “Empowerment Evaluation (EE)”<sup>24</sup>, and Illuminative Evaluation (IE) (both these constructs will be elaborated in chapter 2).

Empowerment evaluation is a form of participatory self-evaluation, which aims to create the conditions for members of an institution to critically reflect on their praxis, with a view to affirming good practice and instituting mechanisms for change where necessary. EE is the use of evaluation concepts, techniques, and findings to “foster improvement and self-determination” (Fetterman, 1999:5). Employing both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, it can be applied to individuals, organisations and communities, although the focus is usually on programmes. EE is necessarily a collaborative group activity, not an individual pursuit. Fetterman suggests that “an evaluator does not and cannot empower anyone; people empower themselves, often with assistance or coaching” (ibid.: 9). While as researcher I do not purport to have the capacity to empower anyone or any organisation, it is my desired intention to understand, through the eyes of its participants, the complex realities that shape the lives of the participants, and consequently, the organisation. Consistent with the theoretical and methodological tenets of Empowerment Evaluation, is its kinship with Illuminative Evaluation. Illuminative evaluation research purposes a substantive understanding of the ‘learning milieu’ as crucial in understanding institutional and individual behaviour through the lives of individuals who constitute the organisation (see Parlett & Hamilton, 1976).

My choice of institutional evaluation using the lifehistory approach is intended to unveil those discourses that teachers, learners and administrators construct, and to subject them

<sup>24</sup> Empowerment Evaluation (EE) as an approach has been institutionalised within the American Evaluation Association since its introduction in 1993 and is consistent with the standards for Educational Evaluation (See also, Reflections on Empowerment Evaluation by David M. Fetterman, 1999 for an appraisal of EE)

to rigorous analysis, leading to substantive theorising. Adopting this framework enables the researcher to detect and unravel the multiple, competing discourses that characterise an organisation's life. This Bakhtinian framework captures the contradictions and complexities and unearths the dynamic and complex occupational, social, economic and political contexts. The focus is not to pre-structure the reported experience with pre-determined categories, with the aim of inserting them into pre-fashioned conceptual boxes, but to elucidate social-structural-institutional understandings from individual biographical data. Whilst the reported experience and knowledge of our participants is the primary source of data, our analysis invariably goes beyond these accounts, locating them in structures and cultures that are usually broader and more abstract than the understandings of our subjects. The challenge for the researcher is to clarify how the social contexts which frame our participants' life histories are constituted, what are their most causally significant features, and in what respects they are typical of a historical moment or of a distinctive social space. In effect, we move outwards from an individual life, to a model of a localised social-institutional structure in which the life is situated, to the wider societal context (see Rustin 1999)<sup>25</sup>. Life histories, used in this way, have the potential to act as catalysts for the generation of new sociological understandings. Rustin suggests that, in some cases, this has "instantiated knowledge of an institutional pattern or strategy that we had not previously understood in an elaborated form" (p115). We are also able to gain insight into the ways in which individuals are constrained and shaped by their particular contexts; and the ways in which they are able to devise strategies to overcome constraint. The most significant advantage of the approach, for me, is its potential for grounded theorising by being sensitive to participants' own capacity to generate social meaning. As we move outwards from individual lives, towards understanding institutional structure and behaviour, it is possible to see organisations as persons (Murard, 1999). Biographic interviews enable us to understand how the different agents within, as an outcome of their professional trajectories, construct the lived life of the organisation, and conversely, how the institution circumscribes individual identities. In the final section of this chapter, I explore some of the literature on organisational theory with a view to anticipating how I might craft a conceptual lens - or an analytical framework - to understand ELET's identity.

## **1.9.2. Theories of Organisational Change**

### **1.9.2.1 A triad of Explanations**

Powell, (1987:181) identifies three explanations for organisational change. The first relates to internal organisational conditions and processes: Change may be developmental, a result of particular stages of an organisation's history or reactive, a response to such factors and performance, clientele, culture, or goals. The other two explanations focus on change as a result of organisational adaptations to the external environment. Here both the organisation's resource base and institutional context are important. Response-dependency theory (Powell, 1987:181) suggests that organisations adjust in response to changes in the type and amount of resources available to them. This tendency is based on the assumption that NGOs mirror and incorporate the larger social

<sup>25</sup> SOSTRIS (Social Strategies in Risk Societies) is a research project funded by the EU on seven European nations, studying a sample of individuals in each country deemed to be at risk of social exclusion. Using the biographical method, the study explores subjects experiences of exclusion and the strategies subjects use to manage these experiences.

structure of which it is part. Organisational change is seen as a response to shifts in the ideology, professional standards, and cultural norms of the field or sector in which it is situated. An extreme view of change proposed by March and Olsen (1976 in Powell, 1987), is that “non profits are a type of organised anarchy, with competing interest groups pursuing different motives and agendas” (p181). As a result, change may be either a political outcome or a random event, “a process characterised by drift as much as debate” (ibid.: 181).

### **1.9.2.2 Internal Conditions**

Traditionally, organisational change has been associated primarily with reactions to internal conditions: growth, decline, crisis. In this view, organisational change is an outcome of dynamic qualities of organisations. A more relevant explanation for organisational change in NGOs may be simply the desire of participants to retain their positions, resulting in self-serving rather than goal directed activities. Here, the more appropriate taxonomy for organisation would be “oligarchy” (Powell, 1987). The very structure of the non-profit organisation may actually support this kind of minority rule scenario. How successful this kind of rule is has become the subject of much contemporary organisational theorising.

### **1.9.2.3 Resource Dependence**

The second in Powell’s (1989) triad of theoretical explanations for organisational change is *the resource dependence model* that is based on the view that organisations alter their structures and goals in response to the external environment order to obtain the resources they need to survive, rather than in response the changing needs of the constituencies they serve. The essence of dependency theory is that because organisations are not self-sufficient, they cannot help but respond to the sources of their sustenance, hence reinforcing their dependency. In this context, the managerial role in NGOs is to respond strategically to the changing resource environment. This often results in the agendas of the funder gaining precedence at the expense of developmental objectives, but more importantly, it enables the funder to gain inordinate power in its control over the NGO.

### **1.9.2.4 Institutional Models**

DiMaggio & Powell (1983) argue that many aspects of an organisation’s change can be explained as a result of institutional isomorphism, a tendency of organisations in a field (a field being an aggregate of institutions that have similar characteristics or provide similar services or products) becoming more similar over time without becoming more efficient. In this view, Structuration is the propensity for organisations in the field to increase their exchange of information as the level of interaction increases. This acts as the catalyst for particular organisations gaining prestige and dominance in the field. This process assists with the “ideological construction or institutional self-definition” (Powell, 1987:182), based on the dominant and enduring values of the field which in turn prescribe how and what the organisation should look like. Organisations that differ fundamentally from the norm may experience difficulty in maintaining their legitimacy.

To what extent are these models adequate and appropriate in helping us understand the organisational structures of non-profit organisations? Do NGOs share the same corporate



cultures and sub-cultures, and distinctive behaviour patterns of other organisations? What kinds of enquiry and investigation will best yield the depth of understandings that transcend the superficial deterministic relationship between institutional fields and organisations posited above? Will an 'insider' view of organisational machinations, through the eyes and lives of participants, be likely to yield more authentic insights than simply employing established templates of enquiry? Will such modes of enquiry illuminate "the slogans, evocative language, the symbols, stories, myths, ceremonies, rituals, and patterns of tribal behaviour, that decorate the surface of organisational life (which) give clues to the existence of a much deeper and all-pervasive system of meaning" (Morgan, 1986: 121-123)? It is now necessary to explore these and other questions, including the mosaic of organisational meanings crafted and enacted by individuals within and outside the organisation, in an attempt to understand how these meanings routinise or subvert organisational structures. Indeed, this study will attempt to explore whether in fact the notion of "organisational structure" is anomalous and anachronistic in a post-modern, globalised world?

The next chapter, "Methodological Explorations" examines more substantively, how one might engage in empirical enquiry that has the potential to be simultaneously enlightening, empowering and destabilising. It examines how I, as researcher and author of this text, may expand my theoretical, philosophical and methodological insights into the craft of empirical research and how this might be done without substituting one brand of methodological triumphalism with another. It examines whether the research experience, for the participants in this study, can have additional spin-offs, in the form of heightened self-awareness and affirmation of their lay ontologies, which might constitute the building blocks for a more substantive theorising of their practices. Finally, lest I smugly and vaingloriously claim to know the world in the act of analysing and describing it, I turn my discovery on its head in the hope that the inverted view may generate unanticipated insights so that the "as yet unnameable" begins to proclaim itself. (Derrida, 1978:293 in Lather, 1991: xx)

## Chapter 2

### Methodological Explorations

*....Far on the ringing plains of the windy Troy  
I am a part of all that I have met;  
Yet all the experience is an arch witherthro'  
Gleams that untravell'd world, whose margins fades  
For ever and for ever when I move.  
How dull it is to pause, to make an end,  
To rust unburnish'd, not to shine in use!  
As tho' to breathe were life. Life piled on life  
Were all to little, and of one to me  
Little remains: but every hour is saved  
From that eternal silence, something more,  
A bringer of new things; and vile it were  
For some three suns to store and hoard myself,  
And this gray spirit yearning in desire  
To follow knowledge like a sinking star,  
Beyond the utmost bound of human thought...*

*From, Ulysses, by Alfred Lord Tennyson (1809-1892)*

#### 2.1 Methodological Pluralism

The instinctive foundation of intellectual life is curiosity (Bertrand Russell, 1960), the impulse "to follow knowledge like a sinking star, beyond the utmost bound of human thought..." (Tennyson). Not the perverse curiosity of peering through curtains after dark, but the impulse, vitality and courage to destabilise our apple-cart of assumptions about the world; to be one whose whole being is staked on a critical sense of being unwilling to accept easy formulas, or ready-made clichés, or the smooth, ever so accommodating confirmations of what the powerful or conventional have to say, and what they do (Said, 1996: 22-23). The project of making everything knowable through supposedly impersonal norms and procedures of "science" has been challenged and the hope of "constructing a grand narrative, either intellectual or political, that will give us ultimate truth and will lead us to our freedom has been shattered in many ways" (Father, 1991: vii). What does this mean for empirical social research in the postmodern world?

Just as the traditional empiricist theory of knowledge can no longer offer a coherent God's eye rationalist perspective of how to distinguish knowledge from conjecture, methodology can no longer stand as the "referent point from resolving the practice-level issue of distinguishing good from bad research" (Smith, 1993). My attempt at opening the window of lifehistory research as a window to institutional evaluation proceeds from the standpoint that displacing conventional approaches of evaluation with revolutionary methods is both naïve and counterproductive. Instead, I believe that in order to enjoy the full benefit of years of accumulated experience and expertise offered by positivist approaches, we need to embrace and utilise it in combination with other strategies for

producing realist evaluations of institutions. This is not a liberalist excuse for not making committed methodological choices. It is born out of a commitment that all approaches, conservative and radical, are subject to critical review and, as such, must finally be left as multiple and contested. The only way to an accurate view and confident knowledge of the world is, in the words of Marcus and Fischer, (1986:15 in Cary, 1999) “through a sophisticated epistemology that takes full account of intractable contradiction, paradox, irony, and uncertainty in the explanation of human activities”.

This chapter is devoted to an exploration of some of the tools of social enquiry. The chapter is divided into three parts. The first part explores the possibility of an alternative “postmodern” conception to the dominant canon of evaluation research. It theorises the genre of emancipatory evaluation and considers the potential of illuminative and empowerment evaluation in excavating institutional identity. It then provides an overview of the genealogical approach of excavating data, using the Lifehistory approach. Part 2 describes the research design, the research instruments, the data collection strategy and proposed analytical tools. While this chapter is a theoretical exploration of what constitutes an appropriate methodology, I return to the issues in chapter 7, putting them up for scrutiny, reflecting on the research process, providing a reflexive critical commentary of my experiences, my learnings, my doubts and suspicions, and attempt once again to provide a theoretical basis for my critique.

## 2.2 Using Evaluation Research as a Tool to Excavate Institutional Identity.

“Like many other young emerging fields, evaluation is troubled by definitional and ideological disputes” (Worthens: 1987:43). There is little consensus on the practice of evaluations although there are various prescriptions on what counts as credible evaluation. Scriven, (in Worthens, 1987:43) summarises the evaluation dilemma:

*The proliferation of evaluation models is a sign of the ferment of the field and the seriousness of the methodological problems which evaluation encounters. In this sense, it is a hopeful sign. But it makes a balanced overview very hard to achieve; one might as well try to describe the “typical animal” or the “ideal animal” in a zoo.*

(Scriven, 1984:49)

Worthens extends the animal metaphor by suggesting that trying to understand evaluation by reading the various commentaries and prescriptions of evaluation’s theoreticians is rather like trying to learn what an elephant is, by piecing together reports of several blind people, each of whom happens to grasp a different portion of the elephant’s anatomy (ibid.: 44). The study will not re-enter the debates on the relative benefits of competing evaluation methods, except to perhaps state the obvious: that evaluators’ philosophical and methodological predispositions influence their choice of research designs, data collection and analysis methods and interpretative techniques. In recent years, the increasing variety of methodological perspectives is gaining legitimacy in educational evaluation, and is “adding richness of perspectives to a field still too young to opt for any single ideal evaluation paradigm” (Worthens, 1987:54). In the table below, Talmage (1982 in Worthens, 1987) provides a useful distinction between the dominant evaluation approaches:

Table 1 : Four Methodological Approaches in Programme Evaluation

	<i><b>Experiment- alists</b></i>	<i><b>Eclectics</b></i>	<i><b>Describers</b></i>	<i><b>Benefit Cost Analysers</b></i>
	Cook & Cambell (1979) Riecken & Borouch (1974) Rivilin & Timpane (1975)	Bryk (1978) Cronbach (1980) Wiess & Rein (1972)	Parlett & Hamilton(77) Patton (1980) Stake (1975)	Haller (1975) Levin (1975) Thompson (1980)
Philosophical base	Positivist	Modified positivist to pragmatic	Phenomological	Logical/Analytical
Disciplinary base	Psychology	Psychology, Sociology, Political Science	Sociology, Anthropology	Economics, accounting
Focus of methodology	Identify causal links	Augment search for causal links with process and contextual data	Describe programme holistically and from perspectives of the participants	Judge worth of programme in terms of costs and benefits
Methodology	Experimental & quasi- experimental designs	Quasi-experimental designs; case studies; descriptions	Ethnography; case studies; participant observation; triangulation	Benefit-cost analysis
Variables	Predetermined as input output	Predetermined plus emerging	Emerging in course of evaluation	Predetermined
Control or comparison group	Yes	Where possible	Not necessary	Yes
Participant's role in carrying out evaluation	None	None to interactive	Varies(may react to field notes)	None
Evaluator's role	Independent of programme	Cooperative	Interactive	Independent of programme
Political pressures (internal-external)	Controlled in design or ignored	Accommodated	Describe	Ignore
Focus of evaluation report	Render "go/no go" decision	Interpret and recommend for programme improvement	Present holistic portrayal of programme in progress	Render judgement

Source: Talmage (1982: 600 in Worthens, 1987)

While this research is unlikely to solve the problem of the fragmented nature of evaluation, the intention is to know enough about the elephant to recognise it when we see it. I would however, through the course of this research project, like to contribute another portion to the already complex anatomy of the elephant, which appears to be absent in the literature: the role of lifehistory approach as a significant methodological

tool in evaluation research. In this study therefore, I locate evaluation research in the ethnographic, social anthropological domain.

Evaluation studies in South Africa have been criticised for focussing inadequately on the ethnographic and anthropological domains, serving a bureaucratic function for funders and donors, based on self reports by programme participants, providing data on teaching behaviours rather than data on teacher understanding (Jansen, 1996:3). Jansen argues that one way of resolving the dilemma of unreliable evaluation reports is to set a new standard for evaluation reports e.g., “producing the richly contextualised narratives which bring to light powerful findings on impact beyond statistical summaries” (ibid.:7). Inspired by the need to set a new standard in evaluation studies, the research methodology is influenced by the genre of emancipatory evaluation theorised and popularised by Fetterman, (1999) and Parlett & Hamilton, (1976)

### 2.3 In Search of an Emancipatory Approach to Evaluation Studies

My quest for an alternative emancipatory approach to evaluation studies derives from an acknowledgement that there is no neutral research in an unjust world (Lather, 1991). I am therefore influenced by Lather’s “praxis of the present” which, she suggests, draws on feminist research, neo-Marxist critical ethnography and Freirean empowering or participatory research, each of which is premised upon a transformative agenda with respect to social structure and methodological norms. Hence, this post-positivist<sup>26</sup> conception of research and evaluation advocates modes of enquiry which recognise knowledge as “socially constituted, historically embedded, and value based” (Lather, 1991). In this approach, praxis-oriented researchers seek emancipatory knowledge rather than the illusory value-free knowledge. Emancipatory knowledge, Lather argues, “increases awareness of the contradictions distorted or hidden by everyday understandings, and in doing so it directs attention to the possibilities for social transformation inherent in the present configuration of social processes” (Lather, 1991: 52). “For researchers with emancipatory aspirations, doing empirical work offers a powerful opportunity for praxis to the extent that it enables people to change by encouraging self reflection and a deeper understanding of their particular situations” (Lather, 1991: 56). Adopting a critical perspective on educational evaluation alerts us to contradictions and possibilities in institutions and organisations, making the notion of emancipation a reasonable aspiration.

#### 2.3.1 What Would a Postmodern<sup>27</sup> Evaluation Look Like?

Firstly, I would be reluctant to venture into any definitive categorisations, definitions or typologies in an attempt to launch a new “rubric prototype” (Pillow, 2000). However, for

<sup>26</sup> Lather’s notion of postpositivism embraces the whole range of philosophical and methodological movements since positivism, including poststructuralism and postmodernism.

<sup>27</sup> Some authors hyphenate ‘post-modern’ whereas others do not. Whether or not to hyphenate ‘post’ words is largely a matter of personal taste, but Pauline Rosenau (1992, in Gough 2001) suggests that a hyphen and/or its absence signals a position: ‘The absence of the hyphen has come to imply a certain sympathy with post-modernism [sic] and a recognition of its legitimacy, whereas the hyphen indicates a critical posture’—although she also notes that exceptions to this apparent convention can be found with increasing frequency.



the sake of intelligibility, I will make a few generic observations about what a postmodern evaluation of institutional identity could look like. Firstly, as already mentioned, the postmodern evaluator would resist the temptation to smugly dismiss modernist approaches as passé, but would attempt to understand how it coexists alongside modernity. In this sense, it is multi-paradigmatic: while those who work within the positivist paradigm see their contribution as adhering to established canons, a postmodern evaluator would attempt to construct new designs based on alternative tenets and epistemological commitments, moving research in different and contradictory directions in the hope that more illuminating ways of knowing will emerge (Lather, 1991:69). It frees the researcher from what Blumenthal (1999:5); Wengraf (2001) calls the "tyranny of methodoltry" which hinders new discoveries, preventing us from raising questions never asked before and from being illuminated by ideas that do not fit into pre established boxes (ibid.:5). It recognises ambivalence, not as a contradiction, but a signal of the coexistence of multiple identities, some emergent and prioritised, some diminished in importance (ibid.:8). It requires that the evaluator resist the tendency to impose her own constructions of reality on the researched in favour of a reciprocal dialogue. In challenging her own positionality and its influence on the research process, Lather (1991:83) asks the following questions, which I find particularly useful as a self-interrogative reality check:

- Did I encourage ambivalence, ambiguity and multiplicity, or did I impose order and structure? What elements of legislation and prescription underlie my efforts? How have I policed the boundaries of what can be imagined?
- What is most densely invested? What has been muted, repressed, unheard? How has what I have done shaped, subverted, complicated? Have I confronted my own evasions and raised doubts about any illusions of closure?
- Did I create a text that was multiple without being pluralistic, double without being paralysed? Have I questioned the textual staging of knowledge in a way that keeps my own authority from being reified?
- Did I focus on the limits of my own conceptualisations?
- Who are my "others"? What binaries structure my arguments? What hierarchies are at play? Have I imagined "that would contain only subjects: no more speculators, only actors, all similarly compromised, with no possible exceptions"?
- Did I make resistant discourses and subject positions more widely available? Did my work multiply political spaces and prevent concentration of power in any one point? Perhaps most importantly, did it go beyond critique to help in producing pluralized spaces for the emergence of subjected knowledges and for the organisation of knowledges?

In "Getting Smart", Lather (1991) focuses on three interwoven issues: the need for reciprocity, the stance of dialectical theory building versus theoretical imposition, and the question of validity in praxis-oriented research. For Lather, reciprocity implies give and take, a mutual negotiation of meaning and power. It has long been recognised as a valuable aspect of fieldwork, in creating the conditions that yield rich data because the researcher moves from the status of stranger to friend and thus is able to gather personal knowledge from subjects more easily (ibid.: 57). The goal of emancipatory research is to encourage self-reflection and deeper understanding on the part of the researched at least as much as it is to generate empirically grounded theoretical knowledge. To achieve this, interviews are conducted in an interactive, dialogic manner that requires self-disclosure on the part of researcher to encourage reciprocity.



Noel Gough (2001) proposes another useful way of thinking about where methodology fits into the research process as provided by John Van Maanen's (1995) suggestion that doing research involves 'fieldwork, headwork, and textwork'. Table 1 charts some of the activities that each of these three types of work might entail.

Table 2: Fieldwork, headwork, and Textwork (Van Maanen, 1995)

fieldwork	Headwork	Textwork
Producing <sup>28</sup> data by:	Thinking about:	Documenting/narrating stories including:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• listening to (and/or questioning) informants</li> <li>• observing behaviours</li> <li>• examining historical records and traces</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• methodological issues—theories, analyses, and criticisms of how research should proceed</li> <li>• epistemological issues—theories of knowledge (and their adequacy) and justificatory strategies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• testimonies to fieldwork and headwork</li> <li>• critiques and/or alternative readings of other texts</li> </ul>

Reflecting on Table 1, Gough suggests that methodology is one aspect of 'headwork' in research—*thinking* about the questions, problems and issues of how research should proceed. Doing methodological 'headwork' should lead us to ask critical questions about our own and others' research. For example, when we read a research report we should be disposed to ask such questions as:

- On what understandings ('theories') of how inquiry should proceed has this research been based?
- Are these understandings appropriate for the question, problem or issue on which the research is focused?
- Whose understandings are they?
- Why were they privileged?
- Should *I* privilege them? why?

Asking these sorts of questions will help understand the researcher's position the standpoint from which they have identified research problems and commenced their inquiries.

<sup>28</sup> Gough refers to *producing* data rather than to 'gathering' or 'collecting' data. This, he suggests, is deliberate, because he wants to emphasise that 'data' are not 'out there' waiting to be 'gathered' or 'collected' (or, for that matter, 'discovered') but are produced and constructed by the activities of researchers.

### 2.3.2 Towards a Theoretical and Methodological Framework of Illuminative Evaluation

If I were to hazard a definition of Evaluation Research, I would probably submit to Carol Weiss's (1972:6) definition of programme evaluation research (PER):<sup>29</sup>

*"Evaluation research is designed for utility. Its purpose is to answer practical questions of decision makers who want to know whether to continue a programme, extend it to other sites, modify it, or close it down. If the programme is found to be only partly effective in achieving its goals, evaluation research is expected to say something about those aspects. Since only a rare programme staff is willing to consider complete abandonment of a programme even in the face of bleak evaluation evidence, the response to evaluation is generally a search for improvement; so evaluators are called in to be diagnosticians as well as judges".*

Weiss (1972:6)

This definition reflects one of the two dominant rival schools of thought in the field of evaluation (see Parlett & Hamilton: 1976). The first is the classical 'agricultural-botany' approach derived from experimental and mental testing traditions in psychology. It can be regarded as expensive, cumbersome, and inadequate when applied to education. The other competing tradition, located in the discipline of social anthropology seeks illuminative evaluation, with a fundamentally different research style from that of mainstream educational research, to describe, interpret and make sense of the learning milieu being evaluated.

I find Parlett and Hamilton's (1976: 85-87) explication of these traditions useful and provide in the following discussion, a brief summary of their central tenets: The most common form of the agricultural-botany evaluation is presented as an assessment of the effectiveness of an innovation by examining whether or not it has reached required standards on pre-specified criteria. Students, like plants, are given pre-tests (the seedlings are weighed or measured) and then submitted to different experiences (treatment conditions). After a period of time, their attainment (growth or yield) is measured to indicate the relative efficiency of the methods (fertilizers) used. Parlett and Hamilton suggest that studies of this kind are designed to yield data of one particular type, i.e. objective numerical data that permit statistical analyses. Isolated variables such as IQ, social class, test scores, personality profiles and attitude ratings are codified and processed to indicate the efficiency of curricula, media or methods.

Within this framework Lindvall and Cox (1970: 5-6 in Parlett & Hamilton, 1976:86) argue that the 'effectiveness' of an innovation is 'determined by the answers to four basic questions:

1. What goals should the programme achieve?
2. What is the plan for achieving these goals?
3. Does the operating programme represent a true implementation of the plan?
4. Does the programme, when developed and put into operation, achieve the desired goals?

<sup>29</sup> Weiss (1972, 1993) provides a comprehensive overview of the field of evaluation Research, bringing together "a tree full of owls in evaluation research".

Parlett & Hamilton<sup>30</sup> suggest that while these questions might seem reasonable, they embody problematic assumptions, such as the utopian conceptions of educational practice. In recent times, there has been increasing resistance to evaluations of this kind. While the botany paradigm has relevant application to the discipline from which it derives, it is inappropriate, ineffective and insufficient in dealing with the manifold extraneous influences that characterise the educational experience.

The second paradigm in the dichotomy is that of Illuminative Evaluation, which has, as its focus, the milieu within which the evaluation is conducted. While innovation is now a major educational priority, it is not a standard methodological package but a general research strategy, which aims to be eclectic. The researcher is preoccupied with the day-to-day realities of the site s/he is studying. In this sense, s/he is similar to social anthropologists or to natural historians. Like them, s/he makes no attempt to manipulate, control or eliminate situational variables, but takes as given, the complex scene s/he encounters. His/her chief task is to unravel it; isolate its significant features; delineate cycles of cause and effect; and comprehend relationship between beliefs and practices and between organisational patterns and the responses of individuals (*ibid.*, 1976:92-93). Since the focus is on the milieu, much emphasis is placed on semi-structured and open-ended, in-depth interviews with participants.

Typically, the evaluator begins with the excavation of documentary sources, including committee minutes; evaluation reports; funding proposals; curriculum plans and consultant's reports; tape recordings of meetings, and examples of students' work. Assembling this information can provide a useful historical perspective of how the various participants experienced the programme. This data may also signal areas of further inquiry and provide the basis of the interview schedules for the subsequent biographical and autobiographical constructions. Illuminative evaluation thus concentrates on the information gathering rather than the decision-making component of evaluation. The task is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the complex realities that surround an institution and its programmes. In short, it seeks to 'illuminate'. In the unfolding report, (in this instance, my thesis) "the evaluator aims to sharpen discussion, disentangle complexities, isolate the significant from the trivial, and raise the level of sophistication of the debate" (Parlett & Hamilton, 1976:92-99).

The process and experience of illumination by members within an organisation can provide the impetus for what Fetterman (1999) calls "Empowerment Evaluation (EE)"<sup>31</sup>. Empowerment evaluation is a form of participatory self-evaluation, which aims to create the conditions for members of an institution to reflect critically on their praxis, with a view to affirming good practice and instituting mechanisms for change where necessary. EE is the use of evaluation concepts, techniques, and findings to "foster improvement and self-determination" (Fetterman, 1999:5). Employing both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, it can be applied to individuals, organisations and communities, although the focus is usually on programmes. EE is necessarily a

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<sup>30</sup> For a substantive critique and appraisal of traditional and innovative approaches to evaluation, refer to the insightful analysis of Parlett & Hamilton, 1976 entitled "Evaluation as Illumination".

<sup>31</sup> Empowerment Evaluation (EE) as an approach has been institutionalised within the American Evaluation Association since its introduction in 1993 and is consistent with the standards for Educational Evaluation (See also, Reflections on Empowerment Evaluation by David M. Fetterman, 1999 for an appraisal of EE)

collaborative group activity, not an individual pursuit. Fetterman suggests that “an evaluator does not and cannot empower anyone; people empower themselves, often with assistance or coaching” (ibid.: 9). While as researcher I do not purport to have the capacity to empower anyone or any institution, it is my desired intention to understand, through the eyes of its participants, the complex realities that shape the lives of the participants and, consequently, the institution. Consistent with the theoretical and methodological tenets of Empowerment Evaluation, is its kinship with Illuminative Evaluation (IE), both of which accommodate the lifehistory approach as a valuable data collection strategy.

Illuminative evaluation research purposes a substantive understanding of the ‘learning milieu’ as crucial in understanding institutional and individual behaviour. Using the Genealogical method of enquiry, IE seeks to write the “history of the present” (see Meadmore et al., 2000: 463-476). In the Foucauldian sense, genealogy is “the union of erudite knowledges and local memories which allows us to establish a historical knowledge of struggles and to make use of this knowledge tactically today” (Foucault in Gordon, 1980:83 cited in Meadmore, 2000). Genealogy seeks to inquire into processes, procedures and techniques through which truth, knowledge, and belief are produced. The present rather than the past becomes the object of enquiry. “Historical data are used to unsettle and destabilise the self-evidence of the conceptual bedrock of present understandings and analyses” (ibid.: 463).

I find these constructs particularly useful since, firstly, both these approaches have their roots in social anthropology and, secondly, both challenge the dominant empirical school of evaluation research by advocating an eclectic approach that takes into account the wider contexts and realities that characterise education in general, and (implicitly) language education in particular. EE relies extensively on written narratives as a mechanism to focus holistically on an institution or programme. These narratives gradually become internalised as a part of the planning and management of a programme. Institutionalising EE in this way is more likely to be sustainable rather than sporadic (ibid.: 11) Furthermore, the power of narratives in human lives, in educational practice, and in evaluation research, has increasingly become the focus of attention of several writers. Carol Witherell and Nel Noddings (1991: 280), who advocate the use of life histories as a pedagogic tool suggest:

*Telling our stories can be cathartic and liberating. But it is more than that: stories are powerful research tools. They provide us with a picture of real people in real situations, struggling with real problems. They banish the indifference often generated by samples, treatments and faceless subjects. They invite us to speculate on what might be changed and with what effect. And, of course, they remind us of our persistent fallibility. Most important, they invite us to remember that we are in the business of teaching, learning and researching to improve the human condition.*

## 2.4 Genealogy and the Excavation of Identity

Genealogy opposes itself to the exclusive use of traditional historical methods. Its chief objective is to record the singularity of events outside any monotonous finality (Foucault 1977a: 139). The genealogist does not work within fixed essences, underlying laws or



metaphysical finalities - the search is for discontinuities where others found continuous finalities. It seeks small details, minor shifts and situations within which events take place. I find the genealogical approach to institutional evaluation a compelling one because it can contemplate social change by paying attention to gradual and continuous processes that operate within power and authority differentials. It charts the emergence and growth of social institutions as well as the social-scientific techniques and disciplines that reinforce specific social practices (Hoy, 1987). Analysing institutions and organisations in terms of power enables, simultaneously, an understanding of their discursive practices. Foucault uses the examples of *interviews*, *counselling* and *examinations* (both medical and educational) as practices and techniques of power. In Foucault's study *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality* where socially controlled discourse practices are explored, he notes:

*In every society, the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade its ponderous, formidable, materiality (1984:109).*

What is distinctive about genealogy is not its interest in origins, but the form its interests take and the kind of origins it isolates for analysis. Acknowledging that there are no essences in the identity of things, genealogy does not look to origins to capture some immobile form that has developed through history. When genealogy looks to beginnings, it looks for "accidents, chance, passion, petty malice, surprises, feverish agitation, unsteady victories, and power" (Davidson, 1987). An important facet of institutional identity that Foucault examines is the formation of the *canonical* - how is the status of canon attributed? Foucault's model for analysing systems of thought appears to be influenced by sociological functionalism, which sees social life as systematically interconnected, such that a change in any part affects every other part and reconfigures the whole (Hoy, 1987:9). Hoy argues that since each part of the system appears indispensable, functionalism can lead to conservatism. Functionalist explanations may imply either that the "whole is so powerful that attempts to bring about social improvements by particular reforms will inevitably fail, or that the existing social institutions must be preserved since they are at least better than the social chaos that might result from efforts at social transformation" (ibid.:8).

## 2.5 Problems and possibilities of illuminative evaluation

While this approach is a significant departure from the dominant tradition, it prompts a number of crucial questions. Foremost, would be the subjective nature of the approach. Parlett & Hamilton (1976:90-99) ask, for example, can personal interpretation be scientific? Is not collection and reporting of the data entirely at the discretion of the researchers themselves? They suggest that behind such questions lies a basic but erroneous assumption: that there are forms of research that are immune to prejudice, experimenter bias and human error. Clearly, this is not so, for any research study requires skilled human judgements and is thus vulnerable. Nevertheless, the extensive use of open-ended techniques and the focus on qualitative data still raises the possibility of gross partiality of the researcher. Parlett & Hamilton (1976:90-99) recommend a number of precautionary strategies: during the investigation, different techniques can be used to cross check the most important findings; open-ended material can be coded and checked by outside researchers; consultants to the evaluation can be charged with preliminary interpretations and playing devil's advocate; members of the research team can be

commissioned to develop their own interpretations. At the report stage, critical processes should be documented; theoretical principles and methodological ground rules can be discussed and made explicit; criteria for selecting or rejecting areas can be articulated; and evidence should be presented in a form that enables others to evaluate its quality. Despite these assurances, the subjective element remains an undeniable reality and should serve to heighten the researcher's awareness of the fragility of the exercise and the need for scrupulous rigour and unwavering integrity of the process. Other possible hazards and snags, and how these may be overcome expeditiously, will be illuminated in the final chapter of this research report. The section that follows, attempts to explore the interface between illuminative evaluation and empowerment evaluation and the role of narrative research as a data collection strategy.

The crucial question that illuminative evaluation poses is: how do we discard the "spurious technological simplification of reality" (Parlett & Hamilton (1976:101), by acknowledging the complexity of the educational process, while the crucial question that empowerment evaluation poses, is: of what pragmatic value is the emergent evaluation exercise if it does not help the participants to help themselves. Self-determination is therefore the central ingredient and forms the theoretical foundation of EE. Fetterman (1999: 12) defines self-determination as the "ability to chart one's own course in life". It comprises numerous inter-connected capabilities such as the ability to identify and express needs, establish goals and a plan of action to achieve them, evaluate short and long-term goals and persist in the pursuit of these goals. One of the most important guiding principles of EE is the pursuit of truth and honesty – not the naïve concept of one absolute truth, but a sincere attempt to understand an event in the context of multiple worldviews (ibid.: 13). The aim is to understand what is going on from the participants' own perspectives as accurately and honestly as possible, to document this in a credible and legitimate way and make this accessible to participants as a stimulus for self-appraisal. Herein lies the act of empowerment. The illuminating experience at the individual level often sets the stage for liberation at the institutional level. Fetterman (1999: 16) suggests that EE can "unleash powerful forces for self-determination". The illuminative experience enables participants to find new opportunities, see existing resources in a new light and redefine their identities and future roles (ibid.: 16).

A powerful means of inspiring this illuminative experience is the telling of one's story. Life histories fall into the broad genre of narrative research which, in the words of Casey (1995:235) "confirm[s] the arrival of a post-paradigmatic age", an age that seeks to affirm and actively sponsor the voices of the teacher, the teacher educator and the student; voices that have long been absent from educational research and policy. While the notion of "post-paradigm" is problematic, in that it constitutes a paradigm in itself, studying lives through narrative research enables us to reconceptualise our studies of teaching and curriculum in fundamental ways (see Dhunpath, 2000). It facilitates a deeper appreciation of an individual's experience of the past, the present, and provides a means of challenging the future (Measor & Sikes, 1992). It facilitates the reconstruction and interpretation of subjectively meaningful features and critical episodes of an individual and institution's life, allowing us to see the unities, continuities, and discontinuities, images and rhythms (Cortazzi, 1993:5-9). "Without this new way of seeing the institution, the teacher educator and the teacher, our insight into how they develop and change can only be myopic" (Dhunpath, 2000: 543-551).



## 2.6. Lifehistories for Illumination

### 2.6.1 Can Lifehistory Research be used as a Legitimate Evaluation Tool?

Programme evaluation has become an integral component of the life of an NGO, which invariably depends on donor aid for its sustenance. Consequently, in recent times, many donors and funding agencies have instituted PER as a mandatory requirement and a prerequisite for sustainable funding.<sup>32</sup> Traditional forms of evaluation are biased towards empirical research with a strong emphasis on sources of internal validity (Mouton, 2000: 88). Despite the limitations in applying scientific research methods in the evaluation of social intervention programmes, the controlled field experiment is still widely recognised as the most desirable methodology for impact evaluation purposes (Sze & Hopps, 1974:14). The controlled experimental design certainly does have a useful application, particularly in formative evaluations, but can hardly be appropriate in evaluating human agency programmes. My dissatisfaction with this approach stems from its fragmentary nature, and its tendency to ascribe simplistic cause and effect explanations for complex social phenomena. In effect, it is based on the injunction: "Hold all else constant, manipulate one variable at a time and measure the results" (ibid.: 14). Such approaches do not address the total life of the researched but attempt to use the research as a method of social validation rather than an attempt to excavate the truth, or approximations of the truth.

Paramount in an evaluation study is the experience of change. Herzog, (1959, in Suchman, 1972:54), suggests that the study of change must consider the following four questions: (1) what kind of change is desired?; (2) by what means is change to be brought about?; (3) what is the evidence that the changes observed are due to the means employed and not by extraneous factors?; (4) what is the meaning of the changes found? Hence, the exercise of evaluation, inevitably, involves some degree of judgement. Many evaluation specialists choose not to judge, but to generalise educational practices. Scriven (in Wiess, 1972) suggests that there can be no evaluation until judgement is passed, and that the evaluator is best qualified to pass judgement. Whether or not evaluators are sufficiently qualified to pass judgement is debatable. However, it is clear, that to hazard any form of judgement through mono-dimensional lenses is neither wise nor productive. Unless the researcher can provide thick description of the intimate and less obvious features of the programme or institution, s/he is guilty of telling only a part of the story. For this reason, I have chosen the lifehistory approach to tell the whole story as authentically and accurately as possible.

Doing research that opens up spaces for multiple constructions of knowledges, including subjugated disqualified knowledges<sup>33</sup>, necessitates devising ways both to value that

<sup>32</sup> A pragmatic influence on empowerment evaluation is the W.K Kellogg Foundation's emphasis on empowerment in community settings, such as in the fields of health, higher education and rural development. It reflects the spirit of "putting power in the hands of creative and committed individuals - power that will enable them to make important changes in the world" (Transitions 1992:13 in Fetterman, 1999:12)

<sup>33</sup> Foucault describes subjugated knowledges as "...those blocs of historical knowledge which were present but disguised within the body of functionalist and systematising theory and which criticism - which obviously draws upon scholarship - has been able to reveal" (Foucault, 1980, p. 82). Foucault (1980) describes two types of subjugated knowledges, erudite and disqualified. Subjugated erudite knowledges are expert or qualified knowledges that have been buried in the formulation of dominating systems of knowledge. By contrast, subjugated disqualified knowledges are subjugated knowledges that are bereft of

knowledge and to be attentive to the individuals who tell the stories. Narrative research is a suitable methodological perspective in this endeavour because it explicitly seeks to pay attention to participant stories. Barone observes that: "Great stories enable readers to gaze in fresh astonishment upon a part of their world they thought they had already seen. They also allow readers to get better acquainted with people they thought they had already known" (Barone, 1992b: 20 in Harwood, 2001). However, finding an appropriate definition of narrative, which does not render it formulaic and ritualistic is a challenge because it demands the assumption that some type of rule can be made which works for all individuals. In Scheurich's (1995) *postmodernist critique of research interviewing*, he asks: "Whose definition of a story gets to be essentialized? Who is permitted to define what a story is or what storytelling is" (Scheurich, 1995: 245). However, to do research without subscription to definition is a constraint that makes for an interesting conundrum. On the one hand, there is the need to devise a way to style a research approach without definition; on the other, it is vital to be able to 'describe' the research strategies (Harwood, 2001). Further, to define story or narrative could *disqualify* subjugated disqualified knowledges. To avoid essentialisation and to permit the preservation of the multifaceted complexity of 'story' and 'narrative', I deliberately choose, at this stage, *not* to define 'narrative' or 'story' or even 'narrative research', but to allow instead the research as process and the research as product to generate possible frameworks from which innovative principled definitions and approaches may emerge. In the words of F. Tochon ... "narrative inquiry has not fully developed its own contradictions (which may be enlightened by postmodern criticisms), nor has it yet exploited all its methodological tools" (in Mackwood, 2000).

## 2.6.2 Disentangling the Definitional Conundrum

The lifehistory approach is rooted in the social anthropological tradition with its reliance on original documentary sources, archival materials, diaries, and more especially, the use of personal life histories. Autobiography, biography and other forms of lifehistory, each dedicated to the significance of individual experience, have become increasingly popular methods of educational enquiry. As a theory of cognition, narrative has important implications for teaching and learning at all levels of education. Yet, it "*is rare to find an account of biography and lifehistory methodology that does not display a defensive tone*" (Weiland, 1995:99). It is not my intention to rationalise or provide legitimacy for what I consider to be a refreshing addition to a kaleidoscope of quantitative and qualitative approaches to evaluation research. Rather, I want to reaffirm what Lawrence Cremin (1976, in Weiland, 1995:99) said nearly twenty years ago:

*Individuals come to educational situations with their own temperaments, histories, and purposes, and different individuals will obviously interact with a given configuration of Education in different ways and with different outcomes.*

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'expertise' and 'qualification' "...a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naive knowledges located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity..." (Foucault, 1980, p. 82). Thus subjugated disqualified knowledges are 'disqualified' precisely because they are deemed not to meet the criteria for *recognised knowledge* because they are *inadequate to their task*. Foucault proposes that these subjugated disqualified knowledges are valuable, and that this value is very much related to the degree to which these subjugated disqualified knowledges are opposed.

I want to suggest therefore, that the lifehistory approach is a worthy ally in the conception, design and practice of institutional evaluation to understand how motives and practices reflect the intimate intersection of institutional and individual experience in the post-modern world<sup>34</sup>. If ultimately, one of the outcomes of this research project is that it signals a more credible and reliable approach to programme evaluation through the use of non-conventional research methods, it will have been a worthwhile endeavour (see Dhunpath, 2000: 543-551).

I find Kamler's (2001) exposition of key ingredients of narrative enquiry particularly useful as they have helped me clarify my own positionality as researcher. Kamler makes a number of assumptions about narrative both in the way she teaches writing and the way she conducts narrative research.

- *When we write narratives about our lives and/or professional experience we create a representation of experience, not the experience itself.* Kamler argues that when as a writer, she puts experience on the page, she turns it into a textual artefact, that is, she creates a representation of that experience and of the self. The self is not the same as the 'real person' who is writing or simply her 'authentic voice'—rather it is a representation, a selection from the linguistic resources and cultural storylines that are available. These resources are never simply copied or mimicked by the writer—rather they are remade (however slightly) by the writer each time she creates a text. And producing the text in turn, affects the writer. The act of writing and making experience into a text has material effects on the writer's body and mind, making other subject positions and storylines available and manageable to her in ways that were not possible before the writing.
- *Focusing on the story or narrative the writer/speaker is more productive than focusing on the writer's voice.* The concept of voice has played a central role in a variety of critical democratic and emancipatory projects where it has been used as a mode of politicisation and a way to understand and disrupt patriarchy and other oppressive formations. There have also been numerous critiques of voice by language and literacy educators (see Lensmire, 1998), by poststructuralist feminist scholars and by researchers in curriculum theory and teacher education, where there is an impetus to understand curriculum as political, racial, gender, phenomenological and autobiographical text. As a researcher and teacher of writing, Kamler prefers the construct of narrative and story because it is more textual, more political and allows a kind of specificity, agency and analysis that voice does not. When she focuses on the text created as a narrative rather than on the voice of the one who has written, she can better locate personal writing in its social and cultural context, instead of treating it as the expression of a unique individual consciousness. She thus creates a clearer separation between the writer's life and the experience she is writing about. She makes the labor of the writer more visible, less naturalised and therefore more accessible. She treats stories as learned cultural practice, so that the process of production and the stories produced can be unpicked, examined and analysed rather than just celebrated or 'surveilled' for the wrong/right voice.

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<sup>34</sup> For a more substantive theoretical and methodological exposition of the lifehistory approach, see the unpublished dissertation "A Tapestry of Teacher Development through the eyes of Cynthia Mpati", (Dhunpath, 1998)

- *When we conduct narrative research, the researcher is always involved and implicated in the narratives produced.* Two understandings are central to this assertion. The first is that research stories are produced not found. When researchers use the stories people tell or write as data, they are involved in a process of co-production with research participants. We therefore need to pay attention to the ways in which we get people to tell their stories and to our part as researchers in shaping those stories. The second is that research stories are representations of experience. Even though narrative approaches are committed to allowing participants to speak for themselves—to making visible stories that are often silenced—it is a mistake to treat the stories participants tell as though they were ‘the truth’. This is not to imply that people are lying when they tell of their experience, rather that they are selecting certain things and omitting others, foregrounding some elements, backgrounding others. Further, a complex set of interpersonal and power relations between researcher and researched—between researched and the participants in her narrative—bear upon how the story is told, how it is shaped, and what it means. Developing self-consciousness about such matters is a central part of narrative research.

Debates around lifehistory methodology slide imperceptibly into questions that challenge its legitimacy as a research genre in relation to the methodologically enfranchised empiricist tradition. There are three possible approaches to answering some of the questions that frequently emerge on the relative status of narrative research<sup>35</sup>. The first approach is not to answer the questions at all. Now, evading the question may seem anachronistic, but, as soon as we attempt to answer the question, we lend legitimacy to the artificial dichotomy between empiricist research as the apparent standard bearer, in relation to other research genres. But rejecting these questions would smack of the same kind of intellectual arrogance often exhibited by empiricists. I will therefore resist the temptation to dismiss these questions unceremoniously. The second approach involves aggressively extolling the virtues of narrative research, at the risk of becoming an apologist for its legitimacy as an alternative research genre; and in the process reaffirming the dominance of the empirical tradition. The third approach is to propose lifehistory methodology as a counterculture, particularly to those who are weary of variables, and to critically examine some of its limitations and hazards, particularly in the context of research into teacher biographies.

### **2.6.3 Lifehistory and the Empirical Tradition: Dichotomous or Complimentary?**

Without getting embroiled in the quirks of postmodernist research, let me say at the outset that I see no dichotomy between lifehistory methodology and the empirical tradition. Yes, life/oral histories do prefigure a challenge to traditional conceptions of epistemology. They do challenge the fetish for the certainty and objectivity of knowledge and the quest for universal truths. This is because individual experiences are inherently political and deeply embedded in relations of power and traditional epistemology has largely ignored this. My intention here is not to suggest that artistic approaches to research should displace scientific enquiry. I am suggesting that we need to promote “methodological pluralism rather than methodological monoism” (Eisner, 1981:9). I do

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<sup>35</sup> An expanded version of these debates appears in an article entitled “Lifehistory Methodology Narradigm Regained, by Rubby Dhunpath which appears in *Qualitative Studies in Education* Vol. 13 No. 5, 2001

not see any inherent conflict between qualitative and non-qualitative approaches. Instead, I agree with Eisner who proposes that in educational research:

*...it is to the artistic to which we must turn, not as a rejection of the scientific, but because with both we can achieve binocular vision. Looking through one eye never did provide much depth of field (ibid.:9)*

Despite the “depth of field” narratives offer the world of research, one of the most enduring critiques against narrative research revolves around the epistemological significance of life histories. Eisner (1981), argues that education must go beyond both the empirical-analytical and historical-hermeneutic to become a form of acquired self-knowledge. By making individuals more consciously aware of the social and ideological roots of their self-understanding, they are able to alter, reject or make more secure, their tentative views of the world. Educational research has to focus on the self as a living contradiction. It should acknowledge the essential fallibility of human beings, and empower individuals to theorise about their own professional practice as they attempt to improve the quality of their own and others’ learning.

#### **2.6.4 Lifehistory: an articulate voice, an authentic lens**

Biographies fall into the broad genre of narrative research which, in the words of Casey (1995:235), “confirm[s] the arrival of a post-paradigmatic age”- an age that seeks to affirm and actively sponsor the voices of the teacher, the teacher educator and the student; voices that have long been absent from educational research and policy. While the notion of “post-paradigm” is problematic in that it constitutes a paradigm in itself, studying teacher educators’ lives through narrative research enables us to reconceptualise our studies of teaching and curriculum in fundamentally different ways. I want to coin this alternate lens as a “**Narradigm**”. The notion of a “Narradigm” affirms the reality that our lives are intrinsically narrative in quality. We experience the world and represent our experience narratively. Biographies and other forms of life writing enable the reconstruction and interpretation of subjectively meaningful features and critical episodes of a teacher educator’s life, allowing us to see the unities, continuities, and discontinuities, images and rhythms (Cortazzi, 1993:5-9). Without this new way of seeing the teacher, our insight into how teachers develop can only be myopic.

The importance of educators’ biographies or professional lives is being acknowledged by several educationists (see, e.g. Goodson, 1992; Huberman, 1993; Belenky, 1986; Casey, 1995, Calderhead & Gates, 1993; Clandinin & Connelly, 1996; Witherall & Noddings, 1991). As a theoretical approach, Kelchtermans (1993:443-456) characterises the biographic perspective as having five general features. It is “narrative, constructivistic, contextualistic, interactionistic, and dynamic”.

The narrative element refers to the subjective, narrative form in which educators present their career experiences. The focus is not on the factual accuracy of the story constructed, but on the meaning they have for the respondent. In this regard, the approach is also constructivistic since the story is a composition of construed meanings and self-representations (Ball & Goodson, 1986). Markus & Wurf (1987, in Kelchtermans, 1993), emphasise that the self-concept is not a monolithic entity but rather a collection of different types of self-representations. Since one never has access to the complete set of representations of oneself, Markus and Wurf see the term “working self-concept or self - concept of the moment” as “a continually shifting array of accessible



self knowledge". The authors further assert that we achieve our personal identities and self-concept through the use of "Narrative configuration" (ibid.), and make our existence into a whole by understanding it as an expression of a single unfolding story. There is no formula for representing the configuration in a particular life, only the interests and point of view of the biographer. Biographers achieve this configuration by crossing disciplinary boundaries, allowing a number of disciplines to converge, while each maintains its own integrity. For example, Huberman, (1993), who foregrounds the psychological discipline, embeds his stage model of teacher development in a sociological analysis of how educators change. Labov (1981, in Cortazzi, 1993:14) on the other hand "collaborate[s] from linguistic and psychotherapeutic backgrounds".

In another sense, the post-modern age can be confusing and chaotic. Hargreaves (1993:96), argues that the plurality and diversity of different voices can create a "cacophony of fragmented and dissonant perspectives and desires". Instead of a wealth and plurality of insight and perception, "we can become trapped within an autistic culture of miscommunication and misunderstanding; a culture with no hope of consensus, community or common ground" (ibid.). Moreover, narrative research places emphasis on personal stories and narratives, the intensely individual nature of each person's experience and on people constantly remaking themselves as an active, ongoing social project. This can divert attention from the ways in which apparently the inheritances of history and the systematic influences of economics, politics and bureaucracy subtly structure diverse experiences. This structured neglect has implications for the contemporary practice and study of teacher development which is becoming overly focused on teachers' stories and narratives of the personal practical, to the exclusion of issues and experiences that are deeply embedded in a world that is also social, political and historical (see Hargreaves, 1993).

It is crucial therefore, that biography is located in a larger tapestry of individual, community and institutional enquiry. Without a clear focus on this contextual intersection of life in relation to history, social science, education, feminist and minority perspectives, writing biographies are indeed trivial pursuits. In a narrative discourse therefore, events are always presented in their context. Context that refers to the physical, institutional environment as well as the social, cultural and interpersonal environment includes significant others such as parents, mentors, colleagues and peers. The interpersonal context provides both powerful positive and negative influences that shape an educator's practice. The institutional context, which manifests itself through the education system, its organisational and bureaucratic structures, roles and relationships also significantly influences an educator's practice and career phases (Huberman, 1993).

Since human behaviour always results from a meaningful interaction with the social and cultural environment and with other actors, biography may be said to be interactionistic (Kelchtermans, 1993). Clandinin and Conelly (1996), argue that story telling is the organising principle in educators' lives, a principle by which they organise their experience and knowledge about the social world. It is the "primary scheme by means of which human existence is rendered meaningful...people are story telling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives" (Polkinghorne, 1988:5,7). Goodson (1992: 241) adds, "the story of my life is always embedded in the story of those communities from which I derive my identity." When people tell stories, anecdotes and other kinds of narratives, they are engaged in "a perceptual activity that organises data into a special pattern which represents and explains experience" (Bruner, 1990, in Cortazzi, 1993:19).

The study of narrative is, therefore, the study of the ways in which humans experience the world.

The dynamic element (Kelchtermans, 1993), explores another core element of the biographical approach: the temporal dimension and the developmental dynamic. "Educators' actual thinking and acting, constitutes one moment, a fragment in the continuous process of assigning meaning to the perceived and experienced reality" (ibid.:444). Biography presents rich opportunities for individuals to re-examine and reconstruct their own perceptions of personal experience. In the Derridean sense, biography becomes a type of architecture, a vast array of impulses, instincts, memories and dreams, visualised, theorised and told as a story. Biography takes this task seriously, as it is the task of self-formation, deformation, learning and unlearning (Pinar, 1988).

My purpose in the preceding discussion was to demonstrate that lifehistory methodology has its own sophisticated organising principles. Contrary to the belief amongst empiricists that with lifehistory research "anything goes", I want to assert that while narrative research challenges the canon imposed by propositional discourse, it is not a *laissez faire* indulgence. While these organising principles cannot and should not be equated with the principles of validation associated with empirical research, they provide a framework that enables the biographer to preserve the credibility of his/her artistic endeavour without constraining the fertile imagination from discovering its limits (Eisner, 1981). Ultimately, "validity in the arts is the product of the persuasiveness of the personal vision; its utility is determined by the extent to which it informs" (ibid.).

### **2.6.5 Biography: A Kaleidoscope of Impulses, Instincts, Memories and Dreams**

An enduring critique of lifehistory research is the relativism of truth associated with the construction and analysis of biography. Narrative research challenges the notion of there being no 'truth', but only a series of subjective views. Particular kinds of truth are lodged in people's narratives. Although this truth can be quite different from 'historical truth' which employs its own mechanisms of validation and verification, it nevertheless impacts significantly on the individual's life (Measor & Sikes, 1992:224-225). Fish (1980, in Witherall, 1991:199) asserts that interpreting a text is never a case of being faithful to the facts. Interpretation, he says, is an activity in which we specify what it means to be faithful to the facts. We agree on the parameters of the narrative codes in which we should be operating. What exonerates us from the charge of relativism is the fact that narrative codes are public. There is no such thing as private language. All we know of the world emerges through our speaking it and all language is public (Pagano, 1991 in Witherall & Noddings, 1991:200). Hence, narration is a displacement of an inner reality to an outer reality (Witherall, 1991). Given the isolated character of the environment in which most educators work, it is not surprising that we do not know much about what educators know or how they come to learn what they do know. Yet what educators know is crucial to understanding and changing the educational process (Cortazzi, 1993).

Klienmann (1983 in ibid.: 242), suggests that in moving explanations to contextual ones, we begin not only to derive more of phenomena but also to achieve insights more useful to



education can benefit intensely by embracing such theories, practitioners' knowledge and meaning systems as part of the explanatory process. This is powerfully done by crafting stories of teaching and learning in which teachers add richness and validity to accounts of their work by uncovering and sharing their own implicit theories about teaching and learning. Bringing teachers' stories into the canon of educational literature may confer special status on both the writers and their stories since they defy the commonplace accepted dichotomies drawn between theory and practice.

### **2.6.6 Your Own Experience is a Valid Part of Your Own Knowledge**

There is a growing body of literature in psychology, philosophy and the natural sciences that has acknowledged the value of narratives. The Personal Narratives group for example, has engaged in a collective endeavour to explore women's personal narratives in the creation of a feminist theory. It emerges from and reflects the intellectual histories of the members of an editorial group of publishers in feminist research. The Personal Narratives group in the USA (1989:14) asserts that:

*your own experience is a valid part of your own knowledge, as long as it is subject to public critical appraisal. And any way, it is your OWN understanding and practices you are trying to improve [Emphasis theirs].*

Another perceived limitation of narrative research in education is that it is confined to small samples of educators. The educational lifehistory methodology necessitates small samples or individual subjects because the approach involves protracted observation or extensive interviewing. The emergent narrative therefore achieves a richness of depth which empirical research involving larger samples is unlikely to yield.

### **2.6.7 Life Histories as a Counterculture**

"In understanding something so intensely personal as teaching, it is critical that we know about the person the teacher is" (Goodson, 1992). When we begin by examining the educator's work in the context of his/her life, we find that the educator is not simply a practitioner but a striving useful person with a unique history, which impacts on his/her work. It would be reasonable therefore, to consider the social dynamics, which have shaped the life. Thus, the act of constructing narratives forces the author to move from discrete experience to an account of why and how the life took the shape it did (Personal Narrative Group, 1989). Educators are often perceived as a monolithic entity, objects which can be manipulated for particular ends (Goodson, 1992). Studying educators' lives represents a counterculture that encourages teachers to emerge from the shadows, (Personal Narratives Group, 1989), a counter culture that "works against the grain of power / knowledge as held and produced by politicians and administrators" (Goodson, 1992:11). Traditionally, research has tended to present an archetypal image of teachers, by using positivistic approaches aimed at quantifying teaching performance. These positivistic approaches strip research of the rich tapestry of human experience and emotion. They attempt to make sense of pieces of teachers' lives without understanding the narrative wholes in which the pieces are embedded.

There appears to be a growing discontent with traditional conceptions of knowledge and how to access this knowledge, particularly amongst younger scholars. We do need to "open up new ways of seeing and saying" (Eisner, 1996:4). Narrative research as an

alternate form of data representation “resides on the cutting edge of enquiry into research methodology” (ibid.:4). However, it would be naive not to acknowledge that narrative research is extremely contentious and there remain several unresolved contradictions and tensions in this craft. One of these tensions is the distinction between biographer / researcher and journalist.

#### 2.6.8 Biographer, Journalist or Burglar?

The biographer at work, is indeed, like a professional burglar, breaking into a house, rifling through a certain drawer that he has good reason to think contains the jewellery and the money, and triumphantly bearing this away (Kaplan, 1994, in Manke, 1996,6).

Is there any discernible difference between the journalist and the biographer, or do they both appropriate another individual’s life for their own purposes, “triumphantly bearing away the jewels”? (Manke, 1996:8). One of the hazards of “wandering into the darkness of the forest called biography is finding that there are monsters hiding among what seemed to be well known trees and bushes” (ibid.: 5). These monsters often appear in the apparently innocuous shape of ownership, ethics, legality and integrity of the data. Many an enthusiastic biographer has been disillusioned in discovering that his/her analytical interests had to be sacrificed because of unanticipated resistance from his/her subject. Others have found that the notion of shared ownership and control (highlighted by the Personal Narrative Group, 1989), are illusory when there is an irreconcilable dissonance between the needs and agendas of the biographer and those of the writer (see Gubrium & Holstein, 1995; Ramsland, 1996; Stannard, 1996, in Manke 1996).

Equally contentious is the issue of relationships between researcher and subject. Manke (1996:2) argues that the first point of contention is the idea of doing a lifehistory because someone is important. She argues further that the issue gets further complicated by the writer’s “veneration and awe (of his/her subject) so that the writer is susceptible to the loss of self-importance” (ibid.: 1992:10). Such a situation is potentially dysfunctional, particularly when the researcher’s voice is consciously muted to maintain geniality in the relationship. Conversely, if critical research challenges the oppressive conditions that silence individuals, the critical question is: how can we (the researchers) be outside that oppressive framework? While the assumption is that those who speak tell their stories with their own voices, the telling occurs through the mediation of a researcher who has a vested interest in the story.

While there can be no definitive answers or solutions to the tensions and contradictions raised here, there is indeed a fine line that separates the art of biography from the craft of journalism. Subjects of biographies can protect themselves from unscrupulous biographers by extracting promises that they (the subjects) will have total control over what will be seen publicly. Undoubtedly, this would diminish the number of life histories published. However, even with this kind of unconditional promise, subjects must risk the pain of “reading interpretations of their lives that do not fit the categories of understanding they themselves have developed, and authors must anticipate the resistance of their subjects” (Manke, 1996:13). At best, biographers need to be sensitive to these tensions to prevent the fine craft from lapsing into something akin to journalism. Smith (1994) articulates this tension:

*Virginia Woolf was half-right: Writing lives is the devil. But a strand of intellectual excitement, approaching ecstasy, also exists. If one is fortunate to*

*find a heroine or hero from another time, place, and culture, the biographical activity takes on a strong cast of ethnography. (1994:292)*

### **2.6.9 Studying Educators' Lives - A Story of Action, Within the Theory of Context**

The critical focus for Lifehistory work is to locate the teacher's own lifehistory alongside a broader contextual analysis. In the words of Stenhouse in Goodson (1992:6), it is "a story of action, within the theory of context." One of the most significant features of work on teachers' lives is that it provides insights into teaching as a "gendered profession" (Goodson, 1992:14) as well as producing a feminist teachers' pedagogy within a particular socio-political context. Studying teachers' lives might provide new insights into how teachers might approach reform and change to cope with the challenges of the postmodern world since, ultimately, knowledge can only be produced through an intimate interrogation of individual experience (Griffiths, 1995). To date much of the educational research employed in teacher education has been developed from a foundational disciplinary discourse with its philosophical, psychological, historical, sociological components - far removed from educators' personal knowledge and experiences. It has been produced by "scholars writing within their own contexts and resonates with their own career concerns in a publish or perish environment" (Goodson, 1994:15).

### **2.7 Proposed process and intended outcomes of the evaluation exercise**

This multi-modal, qualitative study deconstructs the identity of ELET, through a critical interrogation of the life of the institution as it unfolds in the emerging narratives that seek to capture its institutional memory. It tracks the changes that have characterised the NGO over a period of 12 years (1990 to 2001), using the years 1990 (pre-democratic elections), 1995 (post-democratic elections), and 2002 (year of the study) as significant milestones. This component involves the construction of the institutional biography of ELET through the eyes of Mervin Ogle, the director of ELET, Tracy Brownlee, the coordinator of The Primary Health and Sanitation Education project (PHASE), Teboho Mahume, the current chair of the ELET Board and development consultant to one of ELET's funders, AngloVaal. The data produced from intensive and extensive lifehistory interviews with these three individuals is validated and triangulated by less extensive interviews with staff members and other significant individuals associated with ELET.

The data is also supplemented by interviews with individuals who wish to retain their anonymity. In these contexts, pseudonyms are used. In addition to lifehistory interviews, the following additional supportive methods are used as validation and triangulation devices:

- content analysis of ELET policy documents for the period 1984 to 2002
- content analysis of all available evaluation reports for the period 1984 to 2002
- content analysis of strategic planning meeting for 2001 and 2002
- survey and analysis of curriculum and course materials and other publications
- analysis of relevant communication on substantive issues: letters, faxes, emails etc
- funding & research proposals
- position papers & conference presentations
- newspaper clippings

- focus group interviews with past and present tutors, teaching and support staff, former graduates of the courses

The institutional biography is intended to mirror the historical trajectory of the NGO, reflecting significant events, changes, accomplishments and failures, and how it has responded to the challenges of a rapidly changing political, economic and educational environment in the context of a transitional democracy. While the ultimate goal of this research project is NOT to generate a formative or summative evaluation report, the data generated will provide the basis for an interrogation of curricular and methodological practices at both teacher education and practitioner levels, with a view to proposing a theory to explain the phenomenon of educational change or, conversely, the absence thereof. However, it is envisaged that the evaluation (as a product of the research exercise) could have some pragmatic value to the NGO, since the ultimate goal of evaluation research is to provide indicators about the effectiveness, value and sustainability of a programme, and whether or not the programme has achieved its intended outcomes.

## 2.8. The Data Production Strategy

As a precursor to the data collection process, I requested a meeting with the director of ELET, members of ELET staff, together with the Programme Co-ordinator, the lecturers and other interested stakeholders. The purpose of the meeting was:

- to present my research proposal and declare my intention
- arrive at consensus on the focus and scope of the evaluation
- propose the evaluation design
- negotiate the terms of reference
- establish timeframes
- address legal and ethical concerns.

The meeting, attended and chaired by the director, Mervin Ogle, was frank, focussed, and productive. The management staff declared their unequivocal commitment to the exercise, and pledged their total support in making available the necessary resources for the research activity. An introductory letter outlining my intentions and *modus operandi* was circulated to those members of staff who were not able to be present because of work commitments (see Appendix 1).

After preliminary exploratory interviews with the subjects, the interview schedules were constructed. A series of 34 semi-structured biographical interviews over a period of 22 months constituted the primary data. They comprised questions of a diverse nature, open-ended at first, and deliberately general in scope, allowing the respondent to shape their responses with sufficient freedom to introduce unanticipated material. The purpose of this approach was to establish, initially, a general character profile of respondents. These questions became progressively more directive, stimulating the respondent to reflect on their personal and career experiences in a more focused way.

Although I made a conscious attempt not to dichotomise the “personal” from the “professional”, the interview schedules did attempt to elicit biographical data that represented the life in its totality, as this would serve to provide insights on how these individual identities shaped the organisational identity. The interviews focussed on:

### A. Personal/ Professional Biographies

- Their own educational and formative experiences
- Their lives both inside and outside the institutions they served as well as family and community influences,
- Their motivation to pursue a career in development
- Their political affiliations, the educational ideals/philosophical orientations/ theoretical influences/methodological predispositions/ and other influences
- Other significant , critical events or turning points in their lives.
- How the above impacted and contributed to the crafting of the institutional biography of ELET

### B. Institutional Biography

*The historical trajectory of ELET, focussed, o.a. on:*

- Its advent, ideological and strategic reasons for its launch.
- Its philosophy, mission, theoretical & methodological orientation.
- Formative influences that shaped its identity.
- Political affiliations and relationships with the state.
- Relationships with other NGOs, donors and civil society.
- Its response to the turbulent political developments in the eighties and nineties.
- Its response to the changing fortunes of NGO's in a volatile political and economic climate.
- Significant experiences and turning points.
- Its ability to mutate and respond strategically to challenges.
- Its realignment of institutional identity to respond to the changing language policy environment.
- Why, in a context of funding cuts and declining student numbers, ELET was able to expand service delivery?
- Perceptions of what were the factors/ingredients that have contributed to its success/failure of ELET as a service provider.
- The challenges of managing and leading an NGO at a time when NGO's legitimacy and relevance was being contested.

I was, and continue to be, humbled at the warmth, willingness, hospitality and, most importantly, the generosity of participants with their time, which frequently exceeded the scheduled length. However, despite their sincere intentions and flexibility, finding spaces in their diaries was always a challenge. Furthermore, scheduled meetings often had to be postponed because participants were often drawn away by urgent meetings, site visits and funding crises. These occasions were a humbling reminder of the relatively sedate and tranquil nature of my job as an educational manager, and an indicator of the unpredictability and volatility of NGO life, and of those who live it.

Transcribing more than 30 audiotaped interviews, averaging seventy-five minutes each, was a daunting challenge, as an hour's recording takes up to 9 hours to transcribe. I transcribed the first 5 hours using the verbatim approach, after which I used the interview data to construct the narrative. This proved a rather unwieldy approach, because I had to make significant editorial changes to craft a coherent narrative out of interview data that was often incoherent. I then experimented with developing the narrative while listening to the recordings, which proved to be a considerably more rewarding and manageable



exercise. However, researchers within a doctoral fellowship considered the approach inappropriate, as it was not an authentic representation of the participants' voice (this dilemma will be explored in greater depth in chapter 7).

I then reverted to verbatim transcriptions, but because of the sheer enormity of the data set, I contracted the transcription to a professional. This was a highly expensive exercise, but the expense was somewhat justified by the fact that I had a data set for scrutiny that was unadulterated (In chapter 5, I will explore the merits and demerits of this approach). Then began the endless task of assembling the narrative of individual participants. I returned the draft narratives to participants, encouraging them to critique the text and suggest amendments. Their responses to the emerging narratives were generally favourable, with the exception of Tracy's, who had reservations about how she was being represented in the narrative. Her reservation was based primarily on her apprehension that I had manipulated the language she used to present an image she could not fully endorse, because it overstated her professional stature. After discussing the issue with her, we resolved that the narrative was not a flagrant distortion of her life, but perhaps in my use of "academese", I was projecting an image with which she was not comfortable. We resolved that we would review the text once the entire narrative was written, when we would together address the areas of concern. However, this alerted me to several questions about the delicate power dynamics between researcher and participant, one of which is the intriguing way in which research participants construct themselves in relation to researchers, how they construct researchers, and how this influences the veracity of data. This and other issues relating to the ethics and politics of evaluation research will also be explored in some depth in chapter 7.

After almost 15 months into the process of narrative construction, and after agonising over modes of representation, I resolved that unlike a single case biography, which I had successfully experimented with before, I did not, in the case of an institutional biography, want to represent individual lives as discreet narratives. I wanted the institutional biography to emerge out of, and reflect the delicate cleavages of the lives of those that constitute the organisation. This required making an important representational choice of whether to present data from individual lives as a coherent chronological, seamless narrative or whether I should superimpose my analytical voice on the narrative. The latter approach is motivated by a consideration that "human experience does not match a carefully crafted congruent story" (ibid.) Therefore, an integrated approach of organising the data along a temporal continuum, allows for the incorporation of the notions of purposive human action and choice, as well as chance events and other influences. It simultaneously allows the researcher the latitude to provide a dynamic framework in which a range of potentially disconnected events is made to cohere in an explanatory and analytical way.

To cohere the sometimes-discordant narrative threads that developed over the period of eighteen months, I needed to make stylistic changes in the re-presentation of the narrative. These changes range from minor, to significant, depending on the intensity of discord in the narrative threads. But at all times, the integrity of the data is preserved, retaining its factual accuracy. Furthermore, in shaping the narrative, a conscious effort was made not to displace the characteristic nuances and the peculiar flavour of the narrator's voice both syntactically and semantically (see Dhunpath, 1998). To ensure that this process was judicious, as soon as the narrative was constructed, it was returned once again to participants who were invited to comment critically on the text and suggest



necessary amendments. However, strategies such as member checking do not sufficiently compensate for the problem of author perspectivity, or what Lather (1991) calls the “intrusive voice” of the researcher. This problem is particularly pervasive in biographical research where the writer, being very much part of the text s/he constructs, necessarily subverts his/her attempt at decentring his/her own authority from the text, since the act of textual construction is in itself an interpretative, analytical act. As I produced the narratives, I was producing significant, often destabilising analytical insights. Being part of a doctoral fellowship allowed me to test these insights as I developed them. As a consequence, the emergent papers and conference presentations, which I generated for public scrutiny (edited versions of which will appear in the analysis chapter), served to heighten my awareness of my own positionality as researcher: that despite my emancipatory intent, I was in fact imposing meanings based on my own ideologically loaded assumptions about the social world, legitimating these through the language borrowed from the natural sciences. Was I guilty of what Lather (1991) alleges as using our privileges as academics to give voice to subjugated knowledges as another way of “writing the self”. To resolve this dilemma, the analytical tools and interpretative frameworks I chose would have to be scrupulously vigilant and self-reflexive in detecting possible lapses in my analytical integrity and to ensure that whatever the object of my gaze, it is “contested, temporal and emergent” Marcus, (1968:18 in Lather, 1991).

*...Come, my friends,  
Tis not too late to seek a newer world.  
Push off, and sitting well in order to smite  
The sounding furrows; for my purpose holds  
To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths  
Of all western stars, until I die.  
It may be that the gulfs will wash us down:  
It may be we shall touch the happy isles.  
And see the great Achilles, whom we knew,  
Tho' much is taken, much abides; and tho'  
We are not now that strength which in the old days  
Moved earth and heaven; that which we are, we are;  
One equal temper of heroic hearts,  
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will  
To strive, to seek, to find and not to yield....*

From, Ulysses, by Alfred Lord Tennyson (1809-1829)

In an incantation of triumphant resolve, weakened in body but not in spirit, Ulysses exalts the gift of life; cherishes a mysterious world in which to live it; and the power of knowledge to discover it. Through this research, I “seek... a newer world”, I might not have “sailed beyond the sunset” yet, but I shall “not yield”.

## 2.9 Concluding Comments

In an attempt to elucidate the research methodology for this study, I commenced the chapter by advocating methodological pluralism, which did not displace conventional approaches, but permitted paradigm proliferation. However, mindful of the limitations of exclusively conventional approaches to institutional evaluations, I proposed an emancipatory approach, which had the potential to make available to participants, through their praxis, emancipatory knowledge. In contemplating a postmodernist

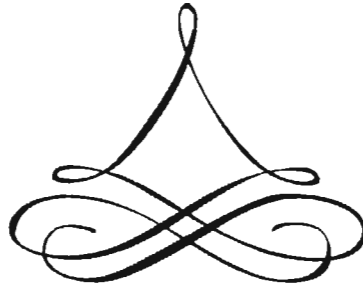
conception of evaluations, I proposed illuminative and empowerment evaluation, both of which have their roots in the genealogical mode of enquiry, and both of which privilege lifehistory data. Through a theoretical exposition of the lifehistory approach as a counter culture to exclusively empiricist approaches, I explored whether it can be used as a legitimate evaluation tool. In highlighting the potential merits of the lifehistory approach, I caution against the dangers of appropriating the method uncritically. After identifying the proposed processes and outcomes of the evaluation, I explicated the data collection strategy and reflected briefly on some of my experiences with the fieldwork. The critical reflexive aspect of the research experience will be taken up in more depth in chapter 7.

The next chapter constitutes the data for the study. It is an amalgam of individual stories, meshed together into a narrative that attempts to capture ELET's twenty-year history through the eyes of its members. The narrative accounts of members are 'triangulated' by documentary analysis wherever possible. In the process of crafting the narrative, I exercised my privilege as author to make stylistic changes to facilitate the readability of the text. These changes range from minor, to significant, depending on the intensity of discord in the narrative threads. But at all times, the integrity of the data is preserved, retaining its factual accuracy, as far as factual accuracy is humanly possible. Furthermore, in shaping the narrative, a conscious effort was made not to displace the characteristic nuances and the peculiar flavour of the narrator's voice both syntactically as well as semantically. To ensure that this process was judicious, once the narrative was constructed, it was returned to the participant for "member checks" (Lather 1997). Participants were invited to comment critically on the text and suggest necessary amendments. The final narrative may therefore, in some sense, be considered a co-construction between biographer and participant.

My decision to move from the methodological framing chapter directly into the data representation chapter, rather than follow the conventional approach of preceding the data with a theoretical/analytical lens is motivated by two considerations. Firstly, it is my wish that the reader should be able to enjoy the institutional biography as a story rather than a piece of academic text and secondly it is motivated by a consciousness that readers will inescapably engage with the data through their own interpretative and conceptual lenses. I have decided to postpone declaring my own conceptual and interpretive lenses until after the data chapter to allow readers an 'undirected' reading of the text. It is hoped that this approach will help generate fresh unanticipated interpretations of the narrative.

## Chapter 3

### Excavating the Identity of ELET



#### Orientation to Chapter

This chapter constitutes the “data set” for the thesis. The data is presented as a narrative, crafted out of interviews with key participants within the English Language Education Trust. The introductory letter is intended as a framing device. Here I introduce “boardroom” which highlights the key issues that will be explored through the narrative. The boardroom is also intended to serve as a cohesive device as we leave and re-enter it to integrate the various narrative threads. While the narrative aims at ‘factual accuracy’ in the portrayal of participants’ voices, I have introduced stylistic elements to enhance the readability of the text. Participant’s narratives, represented in ‘Times New Roman’ are interceded by my own comments, observations and reflections, represented in *italics*.

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# ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATIONAL TRUST



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**Memo : ELET's Identity**

To: **All Trustees, Staff, Durban-based tutors, Jane Jackson and Rubby Dhunpath**  
 From: **Mervin - Director**  
 Date: **6 July 2001**

Dear Colleagues

One of the unresolved issues that came out of the strategic planning meeting that was held at Durban Westville in June was that of ELET's identity. As you all know, ELET's founding vision was the improvement in English teaching and learning in schools in KwaZulu Natal. ELET's present diverse activities have been a product of a process of constant review and growth since its inception in 1984. We began with a fairly straightforward programme of improving English teachers' instruction skills in schools in specific districts e.g. KwaMashu and Mpumalanga townships from 1984 - 1986.

In 1986, ELET, in partnership with SACHED, The British Council and the University of Cambridge, mainly in response to teachers' request for some form of accreditation, introduced the Overseas Teachers of English (COTE) certificate for a limited number of our project teachers. Over the years two more formal Cambridge accredited courses were offered, and the target group for these courses was no longer limited to our non-formal school-based projects, which by 1988 had been extended beyond the boundaries of KZN.

Since 1994, most of the projects have been implemented by various consortia, with ELET participating as the English language-training provider and materials developer. Another development, which was not part of ELET's initial mission, was the publication of a number of English Teaching books. The provision of resources - for teachers and schools - had been explicitly excluded from ELET's activities but as the need for such resources was expressed by teachers, and the funding for this became available, a decision was made to provide for this need.

Another development was the shift from a purely English Language focus to a broader focus on language for learning, as in the recent Language for Learning Pilot Project. This shift also broadened our target group to include teachers of subjects other than English. Another recent shift has been the partnership we are forging with our ex-course graduates, who are themselves implementing a reading project for a number of schools. All these developments have been within the ambit of language teaching with English as the driving force. ELET, because of its history and its name, is still associated largely with English development.

---

Reg. NQ 1357187

PATRONS: Mr L.M.B. Hailbron, Bishop S. Mogoba, Mr M.F. Silberbauer

TRUSTEES: Ms T. Mahuma, Prof. R.D. Adendorf, Mr M. Ntombeta, Ms M. Padayachee,  
 Dr M. Samuel, Ms Y.N. Setsubf, Prof. B. Parker

Within this learning area we have experienced a range of shifts e.g. informal → formal, English → language, → English focus on Reading .....

However, there have been more radical shifts in our activities in the last four years with the implementation of the many Health and Environment projects. While these projects arose from a desire to contextualise our work in the situational needs of the schools we were working in, they have begun to take on an identity of their own. One could describe this change as a move away from a subject - specific focus to a more holistic and contextualised approach to educational development. The shift has not been confined to one of 'content' or subject discipline but has come to include learners as active players in these new projects. This extension to learners has possibilities also for our traditional language projects, which could be broadened to include exploratory research into learner performance.

The Health and Environment projects are now taking up at least a third of our time and resources, and are also contributing about a third of ELET's budget. It is time, therefore, to review our identity, re-conceptualise our vision, and restate our mission with all its objectives, in order to realise the mission with our new emerging identity.

With this task in mind, I invite you all to participate in a joint trustee-staff strategic meeting to be held on **Monday 30 July, at 09h00 to 13h00 at ELET.**

The agenda to be planned by the organizing committee is likely to comprise:

- The structure of the organisation (A critical review of a number of models. *See handouts*).
- Re-conceptualising the vision.
- Drawing up a mission statement.
- The name of the organisation.
- Setting up a separate section 22 company.

Mervin Ogle



## 1

## *In Search of an Identity*

*I slip quietly into the conference room, weighed down by the mass of my holdall in one hand and the tape recorder in the other, with a variety of accoutrements: cell phone, keys, bottled water, the usual trappings of a middle class professional, dangling precariously in between. There is an air of solemnity in the dusky, azure room, as twenty-odd people fix their attention on the OHP slide bearing the bold title: **"Strategic Planning 2001: ELET Staff Profile"**. I appropriate the closest seat, off loading my burden with audible relief. As I settle into my speckled blue chair, I become aware of different voices exchanging interpretations and definitions on what constitutes 'contract work'. I glean from Teboho, seated next to me, that we are talking about job descriptions, portfolios and the hazy distinction between part time and contract workers. It is quite apparent from the tenor of the discussions that this is perhaps the first time that ELET has to deal with labour issues in such an earnest way. Michael Samuel, one of the trustees of ELET and the coordinator of the workshop, calls the group to attention, asking Mervin Ogle, the director of ELET, for clarification:*

*"In terms of the law, we could perhaps regard all part time staff as contract workers, but within ELET, there is a subtle difference in that it has implications for the fringe benefits we pay to different categories of workers. But I'm wondering whether we are needlessly complicating the issue here?"*

*"Are we needlessly complicating the issue Tracy?," Michael asks.*

*If Tracy Brownlee were part of an advertising firm, she would surely be the creative director. Driven by a compelling desire to work in the development field, although she was trained in the fine arts and visual communication, Tracy has devoted her life to Health and Environment issues, and is presently manager of the Project for Health and Sanitation Education (PHASE). PHASE is an innovative programme conducted in rural schools, based on the 'action project' principle to change the community's attitude and approach to health and sanitation.*

*"Perhaps we are complicating the issue...I'm not sure that giving people definitive titles serves any useful purpose" Tracy responds.*



“...the label ‘part time’ is for me rather vague”, Tyrone explains. “For instance, I am sometimes referred to as a ‘full time’ staff because I am here everyday, but in actual fact, I work for part of the day and get paid on that basis, and I have a one year contract”.

*In a quiet but powerful voice, Teboho implores the participants:*

“Why are we at such pains to differentiate between part time and contract work? For me, they are both contract work. The moment you appoint someone for a certain period, and it has a beginning and an end, in terms of the law, it is a contract. Whether that person comes into the office or works from home, that person is a contract worker”.

*This is my first meeting with Teboho Mahume, the Chairperson of the ELET board of trustees. She is a particularly powerful woman within the organisation because of her robust personality, and perhaps because she is also the development consultant to AngloVaal. AngloVaal is a wealthy corporate giant that was one of the founders of ELET and remained its core funder for several years until the economic woes of the nineties forced it to unbundle, rationalise, corporatise and harmonise. The net effect for ELET was that its funding from AV was minimised, putting extreme stress on ELET's volatile finances. That, it would seem, is the key motivation for this strategic planning workshop: to charter a new corporate identity for ELET based on the principles of self-reliance and sustainability. From my earlier discussions with ELET staff, I learned that Teboho has been the driving force in encouraging ELET to make the shift from a traditional NGO with its typical dependency syndrome to a service provider managed on business principles. Sensing a little discomfort with her somewhat legalistic definition of contract work, Teboho delicately explains:*

“We are spending an awful lot of time on the semantics of job descriptions. I want to caution you and I don't know how to say this without offending any one. Let us not be obsessed with titles. Titles are very dangerous, because as soon as you attach yourself to a title, you become psychologically attuned to it. Lets rather focus over the next two days on what it is we are doing and what we want to do and shape decisions around that, rather than trying to fit who we are into those titles”.

*This is a crisp and compelling argument to which Mervin replies:*

“Yes, I agree. There is a need to define our roles, but when you define roles too tightly, people tend to stick to those defined roles as Teboho indicated. We are a small organisation, and I think there is a need for some kind of flexibility, because we can't really afford to have those rigid boundaries between tasks. Are we perhaps looking for perfection, which is not quite possible in an organisation such as ours? There is a certain messiness about creativity, which we should accept.”

*That concludes, for now at least, the fuzzy debate on titles and entitlement. Michael uses the interlude as an opportunity to introduce me to the participants, many of whom I have met on one of my frequent visits to ELET offices, but I see some new faces.*

“This is Rubby Dhunpath, one of our doctoral students, who, incidentally, is one of the graduates of ELET's Teacher development course. He is now reading for a Doctorate in Education with us, and he has an interest in what he calls ‘the mutating identity of

ELET'. I think at some stage Rubby might want to interview you about your involvement with ELET, but I'll leave it to him to initiate those discussions with you".

*Suddenly I feel a little uncomfortable at the attention I am receiving, but that's one of the hazards of making dramatic appearances into boardrooms. To disguise my discomfort, I ask the group whether I could have their permission to record the proceedings.*

"How much are you going to pay us for it?" asks Peter Coombe, the financial manager.

*There is a measured chuckle in the room. Is this a sign of desperate times, I contemplate, or are all accountants inclined to ask such questions? There are no objections, and I feel relieved. Michael reopens the discussions, summarising the staff profile reflected in the discussion document:*

"OK, this is the picture I am getting from page 1, of ELET as an organisation. We have a group of eleven people comprising the director; Cecil Fynn and Tracy Brownlee, described as project managers; and Cheron Verster described as training manager. We also have three senior trainers and materials developers, and they are: June Rehman, Julia Reynolds and Sibongile Zwane. We then have Zainab Amod the Director's secretary and administrator; Yoshnee Pather, the Courses Administrator; Jenny Sellers, the Bookkeeper, and Lungi Mthembu, the office assistant. And that comprises the full time staff. We then have 32 part time staff involved in either the courses or the projects and nine contract workers involved in courses, projects or administration. Do we have any disputes with this profile?"

*And as the discussions proceed, I slip into a reverie recalling my early experiences with ELET. I was trained as a teacher of English in the mid nineteen-seventies at the University of Durban Westville, South Africa, in an undergraduate programme known then as the 'University Diploma in Education'. It was a bland, if not torturous course that failed to light up the imagination. The language development component of the course comprised several somnolent sessions based on grammatical structures and correct language usage, interspersed with monologues on DH Lawrence's short stories. I survived the three-year ordeal by spending significant amounts of time with my girlfriend (now my wife), at the fishpond or in the library, engrossed in philosophical discourses on Ayn Rand's "The Fountainhead" and Marxism, or the poetry of Alexander Pope. Having completed the course after three long years, I was appointed as an "English teacher" at an all-Indian school<sup>36</sup>. In the absence of any meaningful teaching skills, I lapsed quickly into survival mode or what Dan Lortie calls the 'apprenticeship of observation', by recycling the rituals of teaching I had inherited from my English teacher when I was a learner at the Westcliff Secondary School. It soon became apparent that I would have to change my survival strategies if I wanted to preserve my sanity. With opportunities for professional development extremely limited, I enrolled at The University of South Africa (UNISA) and graduated a few years later with a BA degree. I could not quite articulate it then, but there was a sense of emptiness in the accomplishment. It was a hollow achievement, an achievement that represented a window with opaque panes and rusted hinges. The convoluted approach to the study of education, packaged in the form of fundamental pedagogics, paraded as profound*

<sup>36</sup> Schools in the apartheid era were racially segregated according to the four major hierarchically designated population categories: White, Coloured, Indian, Black. This hierarchy also determined the quality of resourcing and the per capita expenditure on learners and teachers.

*philosophy and determined the shape and scope of teacher education. It evaded real educational issues, and effectively entrenched uncritical myopic thinking amongst most teachers so that they in turn perpetuated the status quo.*

*My feelings of inadequacy as a teacher of English were amplified, as schools were being gradually de-racialised. The admission of Black learners who were predominantly ESL speakers, heralded new challenges, with no access to skills to address them. School administrators and curriculum "experts" were rendered impotent by the changes, as teachers were abandoned and left to their own devices. This catapulted me into a very sharp learning curve as I began the task of learning my self anew. Fortunately, I was introduced to ELET by a colleague who had graduated from one of its courses. ELET was possibly the only institution in the Durban area that offered support for teachers in multilingual classrooms. The Certificate for English Medium Teachers (CEMT), accredited by the University of Cambridge, was an enriching and timely intervention, which restored my confidence as a language teacher, and inspired me to become something of a "curriculum activist". Since graduating from ELET, I have maintained links with it, and have always harboured an interest in the organisation and its programmes. This interest was fuelled when I taught a course in Sociolinguistics to post graduate students, and in recent times by my interest in language policy development. As a manager at a secondary school, I also developed an interest in institutional culture and identity. Hence, my interest in language pedagogy and institutional identity made ELET a compelling site for empirical research.*

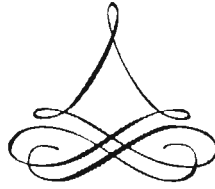
*I am awakened from my rumination by the sound of the audio recorder switching off, as another cassette ends. Peter Coombe, the financial manager, is presenting his report on the financial health of the organisation. ELET, along with other NGOs in the country, has been plunged into a funding crisis. Bereft of core funding that was once its lifeblood, it now has to navigate a delicate balance between fulfilling its humanitarian role and assuming a corporate identity. Peter explains in a rather sombre tone:*

*"As you can see, core funding was 28% in 1989, dropped to 7% in 2001, and is expected to diminish to 0% in 2002. Since 1995, the number of funders that ELET has managed to attract has increased from 6 to 20, but the actual Rand value of project funding has decreased in real terms. As an example, in 1995, the average income per funder was R577, 000, it is now R151, 000 per annum. What this means is that ELET is working very much harder to attract reducing levels of income. There is no correlation between the time and effort spent in writing up funding proposals and the funding generated from it. Furthermore, a lot more of our time is spent on administration and control of projects and on producing financial reports to our funders."*

*"What are the implications for our survival? Well there was a time when money was freely available to whoever needed it. We can no longer afford this generosity. In 1994/95 ELET lost R794, 000 in deficits from projects, since then, we have lost a further R316, 000. So, we have lost in excess of a million Rand in project related deficits. We were able to afford those deficits because we had the reserves. We no longer have reserves, and if we continue trading on deficits, we run the risk of going insolvent. We need to achieve greater efficiency with our administration, by improving our skills through training. We need to be more disciplined with our budgets. There should be no expenses approved if they are not contained in the budget. We have a large stock of books and materials that we need to dispose of. In general terms, what this means for*

ELET is that we either have to make what we have go further, or seek higher levels of core funding. But we know from experience that funders are not eager to throw money at NGOs. Traditionally NGOs have been accustomed to holding out their hands and expecting funders to fill it; we need to change that mindset. But we also need to start feeling less guilty about taking what is due us. The law allows us to retain a 25% management fee, which can be used to maintain our reserves. We don't do that. We spend all of the funds on projects and find ourselves in deficit. We also need to start charging fees that are more market related, and we must stop feeling like poor cousins. All staff needs to become cost conscious in terms of time and resource management".

*As Peter turns off the OHP and turns on the florescent lights, gloomy, demoralised faces come into view. Peter has delivered a sobering reminder of the precarious financial status of ELET. I suspect that most staff had some knowledge of this reality, but were taking comfort in the expectation that they had experienced financial woes before and managed to survive them, and there was no reason to believe that it was different now. This hankering for the "good old days" of NGO life, when there was an abundance of readily accessible funding, is possibly one of the reasons why so many NGOs have failed to survive. For some reason ELET has been able to withstand the ravages of diminishing funding... or has it?*



## 2

### *In Exile: The Formative Years*

*It's Tuesday, 6 Feb 2001. It is one of those oppressively humid days in the Durban summer. Dripping with perspiration, I make the onerous trek from the car park adjacent to the yacht mole, to the ELET offices located in the heart of the CBD. I alight the elevator on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor and walk through a corridor. Passing the offices of an NGO for the disabled, a large lecture room, I eventually enter the glass door of ELET's reception foyer. Mervin, Cecil and others receive me warmly. Mervin ushers me into his office that leads from the reception area. The air-conditioning, despite its somewhat noisy rattle, is comforting. The office is rather small, but there is warmth that permeates the oak furniture and white walls. Perhaps it is a manifestation of Mervin's effervescent personality.*

"We've had to sacrifice some of our creature comforts when we moved from the offices in Aliwal Street", Mervin explains. "We rent these premises at a fraction of the price, and it serves our needs adequately".

*Zainab, Mervin's secretary, knocks gently and enters, apologising profusely for the intrusion. I know Zainab to be an infinitely kind and patient woman, with a cheerful disposition.*

"May I get you a cup of tea or coffee?" *she enquires, wearing her characteristic infectious smile. Both Mervin and I reply affirmatively and Zainab turns to leave*

"Please hold all my calls, Zainab, Thanks!" Mervin calls after her.

*My attention is drawn to an old black and white photograph depicting a building in front of which are standing Mervin and a few others.*

*"Is this ELET in its heydays?" I ask.*

"Actually, at that stage ELET had not been established. It was the Anglo Vaal Language centre that we established. I had had enough with fundamental pedagogics and the rigid constraining system of delivery, which allowed for no creativity or autonomy. So when the opportunity arose, I was quite happy to accept a new challenge. In 1983 I was asked to set up the Anglo Vaal Language Centre. The only document given to me was a survey conducted by the urban foundation with about 20 primary schools. The conclusion was that the state of English teaching was very, very poor. After the 1976 Soweto Riots, a

great deal of foreign donor funding poured into the then Vaal Triangle to improve the quality of education. In response to this glut of foreign aid, a number of agencies sprung up. For some reason, Anglo Vaal thought that they needed to invest in Natal. Perhaps it was because the person tasked with social responsibility was from Natal”.

*One of the distinguishing characteristics about Mervin is his humility and modesty. Rarely, if ever, does he claim credit for an initiative, preferring instead to ascribe success to the team. With a slight hint of bashfulness, he confesses:*

“I’d like to think that I was given the job for my expertise and experience, but it could have had something to do with the fact that at that stage I was doing an honours course in applied linguistics, because the chairperson of the steering committee was Prof. Keith Chick of the University of Natal, whom I had known from the course. I was very flattered when I got the post because I discovered that there were many prominent people who had applied for the post. I was given a budget, and asked to set up the centre; Fortunately, AV [Anglo Vaal] had several companies in Natal. One of which was ‘Bakers Bread’ where I was asked to set up an office. I must admit I was seduced by the lucrative working conditions and the opulent office. I even shared the secretary with the director of personnel. I was introduced to several prominent people, among them, Oscar Dhlomo, the then Minister of Education. But I was always conscious of the fact that from the morning to about three I would travel into some of the most deprived schools in rural Natal, and come back into my air conditioned office. It alerted me to the fact that in SA, there were two worlds: the world of advantage and the world of abject poverty. I had to straddle both those worlds.”

*There is a gentle knock on the door and Zainub enters with the tea tray.*

“Sorry!” she apologises again.

“Thank you, Zain, this is just what I need,” I reply as she leaves.

“Where were we?”, Mervin asks with an air of enthusiasm.

*I am humbled by his generosity, and his willingness to share his life with the world.*

“You were telling me about the advent of ELET in its earlier days, but I’d like you to step back a little to prior 1984. Where were you, what was life like for you, what were your formative experiences which were to shape your later work with ELET?”

“Ah, my formative years! I spent my early years as a teacher and teacher educator in Zambia in the late sixties and early seventies. I started off as a teacher in a high school, was promoted to head of department then to college lecturer, at which was then the only teachers college in Zambia. I joined quite an impressive department, made up of highly competent and respected people. One of the reasons I went across to Zambia was that in the nineteen-sixties, there was a flurry of political independence activity in Africa, where colonised nations reclaimed their independence from the colonial powers. We as South Africans were quite excited and inspired by these changes and wanted to be part of that experience. Migrating to African countries was quite a popular trend amongst politically conscious South Africans in the sixties. However in order to get into these African countries, one either had to go into exile, or work in these countries while still



maintaining ties back home. One of the countries that offered relatively open passage for South Africans was Zambia. The other reason for my leaving was purely pragmatic. Although as graduates from South African institutions we had the same qualifications as our white counterparts, we were paid lower salaries. Coloured and Indian teachers earned two thirds of Whites' salaries and Blacks earned half of that."

*As Mervin reflected on the political developments of the sixties, I asked why he chose Zambia for refuge.*

"Zambia appeared to be a popular choice. There was a fairly large community of South Africans working as teachers in Zambia, while many others had gone into exile in places like Ghana and Kenya. Within a short period, more than 26 high schools emerged in Zambia, funded by the World Bank. I, together with five other South Africans, was part of a staff of 30. Most of the teachers had come from abroad, giving the school environment a strong cosmopolitan flavour. In a staff of 30 for instance, we had twenty different nationalities, creating immense potential for creativity as well as for conflict. Racial sensitivities were particularly problematic. South Africans had chips on their shoulders and had cultivated stereotypes which played themselves out in these sites. Coming from a background of oppression, every White face was seen as a potential threat. Cultural conflict was another potentially disruptive reality we faced. The meeting of such a diverse group of cultures also offered the potential for creativity, as much as it was a source of conflict. Of course one of the more unfortunate negative consequences of being part of an expatriate community was that, as a foreigner, one could never fully identify with the local people".

"I was fortunate and privileged to be amongst some distinguished and widely published academics in English teaching when I took up a post at the Zambian Teacher's College. For instance there was Rod Ellis, who has since become a famous applied linguist and author on the teaching of English; his colleague and co-writer, Brian Tomlinson, and John Samuel, who had published poetry and later became a senior official with the Department of Education in South Africa. I was more or less the junior member of the team, and learnt a lot from them. These individuals had refreshing ideas; quite distinct from those I was exposed to in SA. In many ways, these ideas were inspiring and illuminating for me, allowing me to shape my identity as a language teacher educator. There were interesting ways in which we went about engaging with innovative approaches to pre-service teacher education. The British influence was strong, but what allowed for creative development was that there wasn't a pre-existent tradition of teacher education in Zambia. The preparation of secondary school teachers was a relatively new experience for Zambians and we were given our space to create our own curriculum. Although the University of Zambia had some kind of oversight over the college, we were given considerable freedom to evolve our own curriculum. Because the members were relatively young and energetic, some interesting new insights into language teaching evolved. One such approach was what is now called "team teaching". Guided by certain philosophical beliefs about how teachers developed, we allocated work to different members of the team. We would prepare our materials and share these with the other members of the team. This was quite a painful experience because they would critique the products and literally tear you to pieces. Rod Ellis and Brian Tomlinson, in particular, had that kind of iconoclastic view of things, which really stimulated my growth and development. It was here that I acquired the ethic of collaborative practice: preparing something together, critiquing it, representing it, and ensuring that the final

product was a rigorous and carefully crafted, one which could not be faulted for its lack of quality. There was no room for mediocrity in those days. Outside of SA, however, one's ideas and practices were subjected to a great deal of critique and challenge, a feature that was absent from the South African academic and professional terrain. Here, there appeared to be too many closed doors. Here we still tend to accord far too much respect for a teacher's private domain, to the extent that we do not really know what is going on behind those closed doors next to us".

*I identified fully with Mervin's experiences, as they resonated with my own, although in a different context at a different time. But unlike Mervin who had the privilege of being amongst erudite scholars such as Ellis and Tomlinson, I had no mentor or role model as a novice teacher, only brutish, bullying inspectors who descended on us annually for interrogation and faultfinding. Those teachers who were acclaimed as being 'Good' teachers, held jealously to their professional secrets. I asked Mervin how he shared his expertise with the teaching community.*

"Shortly after my stay at the college, I became an inspector of schools, and a tremendous responsibility fell on my department for the promotion and development of English teaching. We chaired various curriculum committees and what I found very useful, was getting teachers involved in as many committees as possible. We formed what we called the Regional English Teaching Associations through which much of the policy was fed and much of the policy was developed in these forums. Because Zambia was a developing country, nothing was fixed and written in stone. Teachers were given a real opportunity to influence policy. Although the examinations were set by Cambridge University, they were guided by our prescriptions and preferences. There was a fairly open democratic approach to curriculum development and schools were canvassed whenever we reviewed the curriculum".

*Mervin foregrounded the spontaneous democratic spirit of curriculum development in Zambia, which was in contrast with the somewhat pseudo democratic mode in South Africa where a curious situation prevailed: Teachers complained profusely about how rigid and inappropriate the curriculum was. 'Prescriptive' and 'irrelevant' were the buzzwords of the resistance lobby. However when we called up curriculum workshops in the afternoons and over weekends, a miniscule proportion of the whiners would attend. I asked Mervin how he was able to sustain interest in curriculum issues back in Zambia.*

"Oh, it was borne out of necessity. There was nothing there, nothing in terms of a tradition of established English teaching practices, so there was freedom to shape teaching practices. But there was a strong supportive infrastructure in the subject advisory services, complemented by a very strong culture of reading, influenced by the British. In 1967, I was very impressed to see, in a second language context, boys walking around the grounds with Penguin readers stuck in their back pockets. Unlike the single text prescriptions we have in SA, in Zambia, we had a variety of books, even though many of them were the structural grammar books by Hornby and Lado and others. Teachers had much more choice in the selection of, and accessibility to, texts. Students were expected to complete one reader per term, usually unabridged, which teachers would have to mediate. In addition, we would have a selection of about 60 other titles, which was regarded as free reading, which the teacher would not mediate. If the teacher managed the reading programme well, each learner would have read 30 to 40 books by the end of that year. Another experience that later shaped my work at ELET, was that

although the inspectorate and others aggressively encouraged an active reading programme, literature studies was offered as an optional subject to those students who had an interest in it. Consequently, literature was taught more rigorously, in a context where teachers had already provided a rich literary background”.

*The issue of literary studies has always been a contentious one with several critics over the years bemoaning its disparaging consequences on the African continent. In an attempt to rid itself of the vestiges of colonialism, the Gauteng Department of Education recently faced calls to excise Shakespeare and other classical texts from the language curriculum. I am curious about how Mervin views this debate since his formative influences are strongly rooted in a colonial background. Has he been conscious of this? Has this impacted on his professional practice in any way?*

“When I left SA for Zambia, I was very naïve and felt something of a missionary, going to save the people. I had this perception that South Africa had a level of academic sophistication and therefore the answers. When I got to Zambia and met with different practitioners with brilliant new ideas, I realised how inadequate my experiences in SA had been. When I returned to SA in around 1976, just after my father had died, I was even more aware of my deficiencies in dealing with an oppressive environment. You are not aware of the colonial influence whilst you are part of it. It’s something that dawns on you in hindsight.”

*From my many casual and formal discussions with Mervin, it is easy to conclude that he has always had an interest; no... it is more than that... he’s always had a passion and fascination for language and literature. He admits that coming from a background of formal grammar teaching, he has always been good at it, and something he enjoyed immensely. He also enjoyed structural grammar in Latin and this too was something that came easily to him. So when he eventually decided to abandon formal grammar, in the formulaic way it was being taught, it was not because he was ignorant of the structures. On the contrary, he was quite proficient at them, but he made the conscious choice of the communicative approach because his learners did not share his enthusiasm with sentence analysis, and clause analysis. In a private pursuit, propelled by his Zumbian experience, he decided to nurture this interest by reading for a degree in Linguistics. I asked him to reflect on his myriad of experiences he enjoyed in Zambia, and possibly identify a philosophical strand (with regard to language teaching) that emerged as a consequence of his experiences there:*

“I think I took on a much more open approach to language teaching, acutely aware of the need to be self-critical and to understand the logic of why we did things in a particular way. Prior to that, I was guilty of doing things in a perfunctory manner, because that’s the way things were done, and accepted as mainstream practice. My earliest experiences in Zambia were quite traumatic if not liberating. When I was at a teachers college, we had to prepare materials and share them with our colleagues who would critique them. I once prepared something the way I had always done it back in SA where it was acceptable. After my presentation and the subsequent critique of it, I suffered insomnia. The critique made me realise just how bad it was and shattered my assumptions about my own notions of quality and good practice. It was the beginning of a sharp learning curve. In that sense, the so-called colonial influence was quite powerful in shaping and informing my thinking, and instilling a critical dimension in my practice. When I returned to SA, I would quite naturally ask the question “why”. What is the logic or

rationale for a particular mode of practice? For instance, I would ask: "But why do we study Wordsworth's poetry? The typical answer would be: "Because it's part of the syllabus". I would go on to ask what inherent value it had as compared to some other poet or genre. By sustained interrogation of these ideas, I got teachers to gradually realise that they did not have to be functionaries delivering a syllabus and they had the potential to be curriculum developers even if they were constrained by a syllabus ... if they adopted a critical approach to their practice. I also recall my encounter with innovative approaches to teaching literature. I, as is perhaps typical of many SA teachers at that time, taught the novel in a very formulaic way, focusing quite heavily on the "content", resulting in many children being discouraged from ever reading again. Rod Ellis, (the colonial voice, if you like) showed me that teaching a novel was the art of engaging in an experience and sharing this experience with children in a fresh and imaginative way. He would use simple activities based on the novel, such as dialogues, interviews, role play and a host of experiences that children could identify with and relate to, bringing to life the novel being studied. So in that sense, the colonial influence had an enduring impact on my teaching methodologies, replacing rather staid and sterile approaches I had acquired from my SA education with fresh and inspiring ones. Perhaps it was a case of the tabula rasa. There was no pre-existent model of acceptable practice in Zambia. This allowed for innovation and experimentation, creating spaces for individuals to explore their own genius."

*There is another knock at the door, and a tall-distinguished looking gentleman in his fifties enters. We exchange greetings. Cecil Fynn, one of the senior staff members, is the coordinator of ELETs acclaimed tree-planting project, which was intended to infuse beauty in dreary, lacklustre school environments. I explained the purpose of my visit and the objectives of my study and indicated that Mervin was sharing with me his formative experiences, which shaped and influenced the identity of ELET, and how ELET had changed and mutated under both Mervin's and Cecil's leadership over the past decade.*

*Mervin continues to talk about the very liberal language tradition in Zambia, which was influenced strongly from outside, particularly by Britain. There were significant developments in L2 teaching in Britain. Zambia was an English colony, and most of the missionaries were British nationals. Most of the teachers were young English speakers and the people in the ministry were young and influential in crafting a typically British curriculum.*

"Yes, you are quite right Mervin, added Cecil, "You found in the seventies, a whole group of schools had mushroomed and I think I would be correct in saying that almost 75 to 80% of them were from the British Isles. This coincided with the explosion of the growth of universities with the Labour party coming into power".

*Mervin, who would later develop strong links with English universities, agreed with Cecil.*

"Yes you had the University of Lancaster, Reading..., and these teachers were the products of those dynamic influences. There were only two government high schools amongst 7 or 8 mission schools in Zambia, prior to independence. Suddenly, with funding from the World Bank, there were some 47 new schools built. Another significant influence, coming from a closed South African society with a more or less homogenous, sometimes incestuous staff composition, you were suddenly thrown into a staff where



you would find Jamaican, Russian, Ghanian, Nigerian, South Africans and English people. There was this wonderful cosmopolitan cocktail, which had potential for conflict. But I felt immensely liberated. Initially I was intimidated, because of the variety of different ways of looking at things. I had always thought that in South Africa, we had the edge, but realised that we were completely backward. The influence of the UNISA's and Vista's was too strong. The fundamental pedagogics influence permeated all colleges, with the possible exception of White colleges that were attached to White liberal universities."

*Zain knocks and enters to remind Mervin of his appointment with the British Council to discuss a funding proposal. Mervin looks in alarm at his wristwatch. He has been oblivious to the time passing. He apologises as I reluctantly switch off my recorder and close my file. Mervin walks me to the lift as we chat about the importance of the new project being funded by the British Council. The doors open and we exchange goodbyes as the lift descends into the ever-crowded Smith Street in the heart of "the garden city".*





## 3

*Out of the seeds of oppression,*  
**ELET**

*After spending almost a decade in Zambia, Mervin returned to South Africa in the nineteen seventies, where he experienced something of a culture shock. South Africa appeared to have been caught in a time warp ... nothing had changed. It was as though those nine years had not happened. There was a deep sense of loss in his voice, a sense of regret at opportunities not taken, and prospects for change squandered. Mervin lamented the increasing bureaucratic control and the sense of paralysis in schools and colleges, and especially the obsession for record keeping. Records were deemed the most important goal of education. This was particularly true of the former Indian schools where administrators and bureaucrats prided themselves on their clerical efficiency. I vividly recall Railton Louriero, the English Usage Lecturer, who must surely rate, now, as one of my mentors. Back then, he was an offensive, insulting White man.*

*"A bunch of glorified clerks, you are", the balding, bespectacled Louriero would say during lectures, "that's all you can ever hope to be, a bunch of glorified clerks".*

*"Ignore him, he's racist"*

*"Ya, he's blerry anti-Indian"*

*"But, but, he can't talk to us like that".*

*"Man, I'd like to f.... him up, I tell you"*

*Of course Louriero was perfectly right, as I, and many of my rebellious contemporaries would discover when we joined "the noblest profession on earth" as our parents then decreed. What actually happened in the classroom was a travesty. The teachers who were labelled good were those who taught by rote, achieved good results in official examinations and kept good records. Language teaching was about drilling grammatical structures, regardless of whether the learner could communicate in the language. When one attempted to change the dominant mode of practice by attempting new methods, one was accused of importing untried and untested approaches that would not work simply because they were new.*

*Mervin, still in a tone of lament, recalls the days when he joined Bechet College of Teacher Education in KZN:*

"I left South Africa to escape the strangling education system, only to find myself back in UNISA's fundamental pedagogic/Calvinistic rigidity, with very little room for originality or critique. By now, I had acquired a significant amount of experience and expertise because of the different roles I occupied as a language educator and teacher trainer and was determined to make a difference. Later, I applied for the position of head of department at Bechet. One of the senior officials said to me 'don't tell us anything about Zambia', suggesting that my experience in Zambia was irrelevant and what was needed was local experience. I was overwhelmed by the rigid, uncritical way in which language was taught at Bechet, and wanted desperately to infuse a critical approach to language teaching. I found the hierarchical structure completely constraining and alienating. I found that people were not sufficiently affirmed and there was no institutional support for new ideas and innovation. Teachers were compelled to follow traditional approaches in order to allow the bureaucratic structures to control teachers' behaviour and practices. I was quite uncomfortable with this rigidity and challenged it, but was often regarded as a foreign upstart."

*Mervin explained that Bechet was a teacher education college conceived to cater for the "Coloured" population. In the late seventies and early eighties, there was a great deal of turbulence, particularly in the post-Soweto era that destabilised institutions throughout the country. However there tended to be certain institutions such as Bechet College which, insulated from these movements, were unruffled by the events. Like Mervin, I have often wondered why teachers in South Africa, and perhaps it is true of teachers in general, are slow in embracing change, often resisting it. This resistance is often demonstrated by the fact that they would do the barest minimum and be quite content with it. There was a time when this laxity was justified by the differential salaries paid to Black and White teachers. However, even when parity in salaries was introduced, it failed to influence behaviour patterns amongst teachers. They then shifted the blame to inadequate resources, demonstrating yet again that they were trying to defend their lack of enthusiasm with a rather slippery kind of rationality. This was terribly constraining and frustrating, so when the opportunity came to re-evaluate the whole enterprise of English teaching, Mervin was quite happy to take it - even though it was seen as some form of pragmatic quick fix, to help teachers improve their practice. The Anglo Vaal English Language Institute was established in 1984, with Mervin as its director. The initiative was a partnership between the funders, the urban foundation, and the department of education in KZN.*

"When I took the directorship, I was given a copy of an urban foundation report that identified the lack of resources, inadequate training expertise and a host of other conditions that characterised education in those days. When I actually went to schools, I was shocked by what I found there. I discovered that it was not just a case of neglect by the government. It was also about attitudes of people. I remember one of my earlier visits to a school in Umbumbulu. I chose this school because a colleague of mine on the Applied Linguistics programme was the principal of the school. He has his state of the art motorcar parked in the car park, but the conditions in the classroom told a different story. Most of the desks were broken, children were sharing chairs, and there wasn't even the minimalist of resources. Clearly there was a huge gap between the amount of money the government was spending on salaries, and the amount spent on resourcing

schools. Clearly also, teachers didn't have a clue about language teaching, let alone communicative language teaching. Teaching by rote was the norm. Teachers encouraged chorus answers and made the teaching of grammatical structures the ultimate goal of teaching. Children were given meaningless exercises, disembodied sentences with no thematic link. No opportunities were created for meaningful interaction between the teacher and learners and between learners. Where there was interaction, it was sometimes quite hilarious. I remember one classroom visit where the teacher was doing verb tenses. She tried to elicit responses to the past-tense verb by asking children what had happened over the weekend. One child replied that her grandmother had died, to which the teacher enthusiastically responded. "good". I'm not sure whether I was amused or horrified by what I heard. I felt quite helpless, but I realised that it was better to light one candle in a dark corner than to curse the darkness. I realised that I had to begin somewhere, and that I had to find a group of teachers who acknowledged their inadequacies and were willing to overcome them."

"I found a group of teachers in Mpumalanga in KZN who were quite receptive and we developed a wonderful relationship. This must be one of the high points in my work with ELET, to be able to work with a group of people who were happy to grow and develop professionally. This made me realise that because of the very stringent budget we worked with, there was little value in conscripting people who had no passionate desire to develop as teachers. I therefore concentrated my efforts in building a strong working relationship with a small group (between 20 & 25 teachers) in the hope that they would act as change agents in their contexts. This worked because I actually looked forward to going to their schools and they would welcome me. I emphasised that the integrity of the programme had to be maintained and this could only happen if there was a spirit of volunteerism amongst participants. There had to be a commitment from the school to allow teachers access to the training workshops and to allow me access into the schools to enable me to work with teachers."

"My association with Anglo Vaal in the initial stages was quite rewarding. The infrastructure had already been set up before I got there. AV provided the office space and paid the salaries. Funds were never a problem. They administered the accounts, and provided monthly variance reports. ELET was completely dependent on AV. We shared office space with the bread/biscuit company called Bakers LTD, which was a subsidiary of AV, and we enjoyed all of the privileges and comforts of a corporate giant. I lived in this somewhat paradoxical corporate world. In the morning of a working day, I would go out to schools existing in abject poverty, and return in the afternoon to my executive office with all of its creature comforts. I felt somewhat uncomfortable at this dependency but was not willing to challenge it because of the fear of losing the funding and scuttling the whole mission. Fortuitously, we converged on many issues and so the scope for confrontation was minimal. In any event, the dependency was never something that was flaunted and used to coerce us in any way. Neither did they make any attempt to micro-manage the organisation. However, one of the trustees appointed by the Urban Foundation tended to want to micro-manage ELET and I had my own little fights with him. He was quite an influential trustee and we valued his contribution immensely, but he wanted to play a managerial role rather than that of oversight. There was one particular event, which was quite confrontational. At that stage, ELET was engaged in informal classroom based interventions. SACHED invited us to offer a teacher development course that they were offering in Johannesburg and I was quite keen to offer it at ELET. Because it was a departure from the work we were doing, I approached

the trustees for permission to offer the course. At that stage, I was not invited to the trustees' meetings so I had to depend on written reports and proposals. This trustee reported back that he had given the proposal his best shot, but that it was not approved. In, reality, though, it was he who had resisted the proposal because it would have meant that ELET was in competition with the institution he served".

"Within three months of launching, we had our own offices, and by that time, I had already established two projects, one in Kwa mashu and one in Mpumalanga, one high and one primary school. I hired one other person (Judy Brown from Grahamstown) to work in the primary schools with a small group of teachers. We established relationships with about 20 schools. I used to visit these schools regularly in three-week cycles. We conducted development workshops and attempted to build a relationship with teachers, and attempted to grapple with issues together. At that stage, there was no structured programme. We were looking at how, in very fundamental ways, to improve the quality of teaching by working closely with individual teachers, and getting them to be catalysts in their schools."

*"Would it have been a case of preaching to the converted, the fact that you had volunteers on the programme?"*

"To some extent yes. Yes they did have the willingness to change, but lacked the expertise to do so. There were some who attended the workshops and realised that they did not need to be there and in those instances it was the converted that would stay away. It was the committed who stayed on. However one weakness of the volunteer approach is that people's interest can wane. I therefore tried to bind them to a kind of moral contract. It seemed to work. Of course there were other good reasons to stay on. They were given certain resources such as books, teaching materials, audio-visual equipment, attendances to conferences and other useful tools which they had no access to outside the programme. One of the most noteworthy features of the programme was the kind of trust I developed amongst teachers. They often invited me into their classes where I would be asked to teach or co-teach a lesson. We would have workshops once every quarter."

*Mervin reminisces fondly on the creative strategies he used in developing materials for under-resourced schools*

"I remember in the early days when resources were difficult to come by, I found a book on how to make your own resources based on realia, in the absence of textbooks. The idea comprised a box of photographs from a variety of real life situations, and interesting themes, which served to arouse learners' schema. Behind the photographs, were lists of questions and activities. Using one of the subsidiaries of Anglo Vaal, I obtained materials to build my own collection of photographs that formed the basis of lessons. It was that kind of materials development based on the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) that characterised our earlier work. I continued corresponding with Ellis and Tomlinson. They used to come down quite often and we used to meet and share ideas. When I did the post-graduate course in linguistics in 1984, CLT was becoming mainstream practice and was being promoted by the University of Natal where I studied".

"When we started the project, it was combination between what we called needs driven and supply driven. We had what we thought were skills that we could offer, and tried to



match this with the actual need in schools. Schools were selected according to their needs, and we held a principal's workshop to present to them what we could offer. On the basis of this, principals would decide whether they wanted to be part of the programme. We avoided conscripting schools. We recruited them on the basis of what we could offer them and they stayed on, on a voluntary basis. We would typically invite twenty-five schools and work out a timetable to engage a combination of workshops, course based contact, and offer support within schools. As a result of the success of this approach, the formal ELET 'COURSES' emerged. They were excited by their experiences and wanted a little more. However, entry into the programme is not automatic. We were careful about the schools we selected. There had to be a minimum level of functionality for the school to benefit from the programme. Clearly, working in schools that are dysfunctional would mean that there would be a strain on our limited resources, which the funders would not be happy about. In those instances, we persuade the schools to engage in an alternative project to bring them up to functionality. Of the twenty schools we invited, only eight passed the means test. The majority failed because of the lack of commitment and bad management."

"We would hire project coordinators and train them at ELET, by the ELET staff, and give them the required monitoring and support. We hired people who have a track record of teacher training and train them the ELET way. Typically, we would have four workshops a year, once a quarter. To demonstrate the concept, I want to allude to a project we presently run in Northern Province where we have fifteen schools in a schools district. We are attempting to improve the management of the curriculum and the quality of English teaching. We felt that focussing on the teacher and the lesson was insufficient for meaningful development. We realised that the whole organisation of the curriculum needed "cranking up". We focussed on elements of the curriculum such as the devising a business plan, instituting a departmental policy, and going back to the basic ingredients of accountability such as drawing up schemes of work, maintaining appropriate recording of progress and forming subject associations with other schools. The ultimate goal is to enable schools to begin developing their own school based INSET. We realise that teachers are not always deficient in terms of methodology. We discovered that the problem is that they often operate in a context that is not always supportive."

*Mervin and his staff were able, over time, to develop a fairly serious bond with about 15 or 16 teachers; the others fell by the wayside. For Mervin it was a fulfilling experience, working with a happy band of people. There was the usual suspicion and reluctance amongst some teachers, and the usual concern that he was going there to check on them and to report on them. It was therefore important to establish a relationship of trust with them, to befriend them and to reassure them of his intentions and motives. There is one valuable lesson Mervin learned from his experiences in Kwa-Mashu: that if any of the schools did not want him, he should not force himself on them. He still believes, that for any project to be successful, we need to be passionate about what we do. He laments that it is perhaps a weakness in his philosophy to expect other people to share his vision and passion, but believes that it is difficult to sustain anything on passion alone. Although he worked in the schools for three to four years, he did not sustain the activity. As funds became available, he simply moved on to other areas. He regrets that although he left behind a group of teachers who had changed significantly, he couldn't see them being able to spread the influence without the support of the Department of Education. By 1998/99 they had grown from 2 to 8 projects when the Mobil foundation came in as a funder. At that stage Anglo Vaal declared that it would not increase its contribution*



*dramatically so ELET had to look for funding from other agencies such as SA Tioxide, The Hexagon Trust and Rank Xerox, enabling ELET to hire more staff and replicate the programmes in other areas.*

“We were also invited by the then Kangwane government to start a project in Mpumalanga. By the time the funding from (IDT) the International Development Trust, and the Joint Education Trust (JET) came along, we realised that although we were definitely making an impact on teachers, it was not being recognised in any formal way. We used to give teachers a certificate, for attendance to workshops and on their lessons that we observed; the department of education did not accredit this. Teachers were looking for something to validate their efforts. When Myra Harrison, from the British Council, was seconded to SACHED she felt that there should be some kind of certification for the courses. She called a meeting around 1985/1986 where we spent a few days debating what could go into such a course. She promised that she was going to get formal accreditation from the Royal Society of the Arts. We sent the curriculum we had compiled to other NGOs for their input and later had the course accredited by the Department of Education. At that stage, Myra had already been offering the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (UCLES) courses in Johannesburg and Pretoria and she asked whether we would also offer the courses. I jumped at the opportunity. We had been working consistently with the group of about 16 teachers, we had done a lot of site work with them, and so this course was a natural progression for them. And that was the beginning of the formal ‘Courses’, the first being called the COTE (Certificate for Overseas Teachers of English). There was a scholarship attached to the course, funded by the British Council. They hand picked a group of our best teachers: 5 in the primary phase and 5 in the secondary phase annually, to be sent for 3 months to the Thames Valley College, where Rod Ellis was head of English. The scholarship was in essence a continuation of CLT.”

“Once the teachers had completed the COTE, they were so excited by it, that they wanted to continue, and so we offered the Diploma course, the DOTE. We could not get funding from the British Council for the courses so we went to USAID and, surprisingly, they funded the courses. In this way, we were gradually expanding our course offerings. Cecil was instrumental in launching the CEMT (Certificate for English Medium Teachers and PETRA, which was an attempt at ‘projectising’ the courses. This is what put ELET on the map. The courses were offered in all four of the provinces, as we knew them then. But it was more than geographic expansion. The CEMT course was in a sense the beginning of ELET’s autonomy in determining its own curricular offerings. In designing the course, which we did entirely on our own, we tried to make it as democratic as possible. We called up a planning workshop, to which we invited academics, officials from the Department of Education and other interested individuals. We presented the draft of the course, and subjected it to critique, and out of that emerged the CEMT, designed for teachers whose mother tongue was English, teaching in multilingual contexts. We even received funding from Mobil to launch the course.”

“The mode of delivery, followed the DOTE and COTE, but the actual content emerged out of the workshop. The course had a strong multilingual flavour, inspired by a sociolinguistic tradition, possibly influenced by the University of Natal, where most of our staff had done the Applied Linguistics courses. The course was very popular for about three years, around 1992 to 1994, a period characterised by a great deal of disruptions and uncertainty amongst teachers. The course seemed to be attracting

teachers from the former House of Delegates and House of Representatives, the two racially invented ministries that were the first to begin de-racialising their schools. While the face of these classrooms were changing, the former "White" schools appeared to be insulated from the integration process because they actively restricted access, and selected only those students who could be easily enculturated. Most Indian and coloured schools did not adopt such exclusionary measures. Consequently, teachers in this school felt quite inadequate in coping with the multilingual challenge."

"Our relationship with the department then used to be rather standoffish, although in recent years there has been a mellowing of relationships. After 1994, the provincial departments realised that they did not have the capacity to deliver on their own. Consequently, the KZN government began using NGO's for several of their projects. There is recognition that the NGO movement have a significant role to play. It is also true that the NGO movement has become less arrogant about its own abilities. There was a time when the NGO's thought they had all the answers. Ironically, though, in many departments, most of the high profile positions went to former NGO leadership who became just as conservative as the bureaucrats they replaced. However, the situation in KZN was somewhat different from the other provinces. Very few NGO leaders made it to government. The former tricameral bureaucracies remained firmly entrenched in many of the top positions, particularly those from the House of Delegates and Inkata. The old, but powerful technocrats simply slipped through into the new order. The Gauteng province attracted many progressive individuals from the NGO movement. KZN on the other hand continued to be run by individuals with first world mentalities and technocratic mindsets. Unlike Gauteng, KZN had very few educational activists. Because of their conservative attitudes, it is very difficult to get them involved in the many successful projects we run. They are tacitly supportive. They grant access to schools, but that's as far as their support extends. They do not get involved in any substantive way. I actually find working in the Northern Province a lot easier, despite the difficult conditions there. Here we have a combination of Zulu conservatism or what I call Zulu triumphalism coupled with the colonial elitism of the former White department and the technocratic shortsightedness of the former Indian department. In this context of resistance, the NGO movement really had a battle to get things done."

*As Mervin recalls the history of ELET's courses, I recall how the CEMT course was able to change the attitudes of some of my very conservative colleagues. It helped them deal with their feelings of inadequacy in coping with changing demographics in classrooms. It was quite apparent, to me as head of the English department that those who did not take advantage of such support continued to be ineffective in the classroom. Paradoxically, after 1994 when classrooms were deracialised by law, the popularity of CEMT waned. There were several reasons for this. One of the more significant was that the course was not recognised by the department of education for salary reclassification and so there was no incentive. Secondly, it was during this period when ELET's funding was seriously curtailed. Anglo Vaal continued to fund the core administration, but United States Aid (USAID), which had previously offered generous funding for the courses, discontinued it. Whereas with the USAID funding, the CEMT course was offered virtually free of charge, ELET now had to levy substantially increased fees. Another reason was, I suspect, (having interacted with many of them), that a large number of teachers who did the course were planning on emigrating. The Cambridge accredited course was a cheap but useful international qualification to have.*

*Mervin went on to explain the next phase of ELET's history, which he called the projects phase. The COTE, which proved to be very successful, was adapted for a specific project, which was equally successful. This was the PETRA (the Primary English Teaching in Rural Areas). It was intended to be a very measured development initiative supported by excellent expertise. Mervin suggests that the one individual who saw that value of the course and was keen to promote it was the language officer with the British Council. He helped procure funding for the course and targeted the former homelands such as Kangwane, Leboa, Venda, Gazankulu, Transkei as well as Kwa-Zulu Natal. Modelled on the COTE, ELET devised a system together with the British Council to take the course into the deep rural areas of these homelands. The PETRA had the same structure in terms of the minimum contact time of 150 hours, 8 assignments and four lesson observations, supported by peer observation.*

*The modules were centred around the assignments and delivered in block sessions over vacations at Michaelhouse, a private school in the Midlands of KZN Province. The assignments would be done during term time under the supervision of a tutor who would also observe students' lessons. ELET instituted the 'process-writing' technique, where assignments would be written and rewritten several times until the external moderator was satisfied with the product. There were various levels of moderation: Cecil Fynn of ELET would perform the first level of moderation by examining a sample of the assignments and the lesson observations. An external moderator from the University of Natal would moderate the second level and finally 15% would be shipped to the external moderator from the University of Cambridge. Mervin is quite satisfied that the course was rigorous and met international standards.*

*"The PETRA was an excellent course in terms of its design but it had one serious drawback. It was an extremely expensive course. Large numbers of teachers would gather at Michaelhouse at great expense to ELET, without any financial commitment from the students. Michaelhouse charged a very nominal rate of R50 per day for the accommodation and meals as part of their contribution to the advancement of Black education. However, because there was no financial commitment from students, they did not have a sense of obligation to derive maximum benefit from the course. For some it was a free holiday. The added perk for the committed ones was an overseas scholarship offered to 5 of the most outstanding students each year. The scholarship at a British university for three months, focussed largely on materials development. The British government was extremely generous, offering students handsome sums of money for subsistence and books. Off course, many students spent their allowances on expensive leather jackets and then complained that there was not enough money".*

*I understood fully Mervin's sense of despair. I experienced similar feelings when I joined a group of practitioners on a scholarship to Ohio University for an intensive course on teaching ESL in multilingual contexts. It was quite apparent that, for many, this was a shopping expedition as inordinate amounts of time, allocated for professional enrichment, was spent at shopping malls. For those who had a clear focus and commitment to self growth, this experience was extremely useful in that they were coming out of a very closed South African society and being submerged into an American or British institution which was very much more open and well-resourced. They were able to learn many basic skills, which they had no access to back home. For instance, in SA we had no facilities to offer computer literacy. So, students would spend up to three months working creatively in an environment supported by world-class*

*teachers and where the availability of resources was not an inhibiting factor. The British Council would also support the project at apparent extravagance by sending two representatives from UK universities to ELET's seminar sessions at Michaelhouse. This was an excellent arrangement because it provided a platform for future cooperation when students went on the scholarship to the UK, but like Mervin, I am not convinced, retrospectively, that such extravagance could be justified. The money spent on the scholarships could have been spent more profitably on reaching and developing schools in this country. But this is perhaps characteristic of an era when, in the absence of regulatory mechanisms, officials who disbursed donor funds had carte blanche over them. Today however, the situation is quite different. In some respects, we have moved from one end of the scale to the other extreme, as Mervin explains:*

"The Overseas Development Administration later became known as the Department for International Development when the Labour party came into power. The Labour party's focus shifted from the promotion of language to the alleviation of poverty. Unfortunately, they did not share our view that there was a connection between English teacher development and the alleviation of poverty. So when they withdrew the funding, the PETRA course came to an end. The British government had funded the course for 3 years, and then funding was extended by JET (the Joint Education Trust) for another 2 years up to 1998, at which time JET withdrew funding. In a sense, this was an irony in that the funding was withdrawn from a programme, which we thought was aimed at alleviating poverty through language development. Fortunately, there is still a significant opinion in DFID that believes in the value of language development as a strategy to fight poverty."

"However, because of the withdrawal of funding, we have already begun to scale down our operations from an original 18 centres. In some of the centres, the numbers were small and uneconomical to maintain, forcing us to shut them down. Managing quality assurance with such a diverse programme is often impossible because of the scale and the cost. Another problem is that we only succeed in recovering 60% of student fees, which barely covers the cost of delivery. The other problem is the quality control. With the residence courses such as the PETRA it was possible to keep a tight reign on the quality by monitoring staff and also because we were supported by the British link and their staff. With the generous funding, it was possible to maintain a fairly stable quality control. We have tried to compensate for variations by standardising the modules. The modules are developed by very competent curriculum developers, but the curriculum is mediated by people whose expertise is somewhat uncertain, varying from some who are highly qualified, to others who are barely qualified and whose commitment to the enterprise is doubtful. So, in that sense, we are glad that we have shrunk our operations to restore acceptable levels of quality."



## 4

## *The Turbulent Years*

*Empirical research can be a thoroughly rewarding experience, especially when you are able to invite your primary source of data to dinner. Mervin spontaneously accepted the invitation when I suggested that we consider a change of scenery, although I must admit that I always felt perfectly comfortable interviewing Mervin in his office. Actually, after the first few interviews, the sessions, which I eagerly awaited, stopped being interviews in the formal conventional sense, but were casual chats. I suspect that Mervin too looked forward to these sessions because he never refused an interview and always informed me of a postponement. Perhaps it gave him an opportunity to reflect, providing a diversion from his usual management duties. Seated in my living room, listening to the harmonies of the Spanish Orchestral Jazz duet, Lara & Reys' 'Riverwalk' we slipped once again into nostalgic reflection.*

*"There's one thing I have to ask you, Mervin. I listened to the tape recording of our last interview this morning. I was looking at the trajectory of ELET's survival, and the different stages it went through and you mentioned the 'turbulent phase'".*

*"Oh yes, that's right. I didn't give you a full picture of that."*

*"You gave me a picture of that. Whether it's full or not I don't know, it sounds like a rather difficult phase that threatened the survival of ELET. And one thing that emerged very clearly is that the continued survival of ELET through that phase was largely a consequence of management, your management in particular, although you probably are too modest to acknowledge it."*

*Mervin laughs somewhat bashfully.*

*" Yes, I managed to ride that one, but it wasn't easy. It could have actually gone quite wrong. We have always been a fairly united group of people at ELET, but we were not always a cohesive unit in terms of our political views. Particularly during the Mass Democratic Movement (MDM) era, when ELET was "infiltrated" by a group of political activists who tried to change the country overnight by getting ELET involved in political matters. I believed that we had a job to do, and despite our own allegiances, we had to adopt a non-partisan approach. There was this group of 4 people in particular who thought that ELET should be overt about its political position. During the eighties there*



was generally a lot of ferment in the country, with everyone caught up in the quest for that precious commodity called democracy. Statutory authority was equated with authoritarianism and hence was regarded as illegitimate authority. Many people imported that kind of resistance to authority into the workplace. Anyway, these four new recruits began to challenge very strongly the notion of having a director. They felt that there should be a system of open management where everyone should be part of setting the agenda and everything has to be done in a consultative way. I had no problem with that initially, but what was happening was that people were losing sight of their mission of serving teachers. I was firm about not allowing my private affiliations to impact on my institutional responsibilities. So even though I supported the ANC, I realised that many of the teachers we served had different affiliations, and we had to respect that. The staff demanded that I become more explicit about my affiliation. I refused. I believed in freedom of association and action. I was labelled a liberal. And so there was a clash between what they believed to be democracy and solidarity and my position, which was regarded as conservative liberalism. Interestingly three of the women were White radical leftists, with strong feminist orientations. There was a young person whom I had liked very much, but she too was sucked into this cabal. I admired their convictions, but they were losing focus. Consequently, every decision was challenged and there had to be endless meetings to accommodate these challenges. There was always disagreement and a considerable amount of hostility was directed at me because there were certain things that I refused to permit. I suddenly realised that I was quite authoritarian. I informed the trustees of the position. I told them that they appointed me as director and that my position was being compromised. They would not have my position compromised. I believed very strongly, from my observation of other organisations, that with open management systems, there was a diminution of responsibility. If you locate power in one person, you can make that power accountable. If I am the person who makes the decision about purchasing a new photocopier, whether it was a wise or an unwise decision, I can be held accountable for the decision. If you start diffusing responsibility collectively, individuals are not prepared to take responsibility individually. Consequently, you end up having cliques where the most articulate people actually have power, but that power is not accountable to anyone."

"My life was becoming quite a misery. Every decision was being challenged. This democracy thing became an obsession. There comes a point when, as a manager, you *have* to take unilateral decisions. These decisions should be transparent: the procedures leading up to that decision should be open to scrutiny, but the decision should be made by the person appointed to do so. At one stage, the Congress of Trade Unions (COSATU) called for a stay-away. The staff wanted me to close the centre to express solidarity because COSATU said so. I said, No! I agree with the call, and I, in my private capacity, might elect to stay away, but I am not prepared to deny anyone else access to the centre. If you elect to stay away, I respect that choice. That to me was the essence of democracy. My work as director was essentially political - I was certainly not apolitical, I simply chose to conduct my political work in less confrontational ways. They could not understand the difference between being non-partisan and non-committal. They could not understand the difference between one's public and private affiliations. For me, as director of an NGO, it was completely foolish and un-strategic to be seen taking particular political allegiances. We had work to do in schools and we needed access into these schools. There were often gatekeepers who were of a different political inclination and one could not afford to develop an antagonistic relationship with them. For instance, we were negotiating access with the DEC (Department of Education and Culture), which



was largely made up of Inkatha bureaucrats. If you flaunted your ANC banner, it would have been completely suicidal, both for your developmental mission and in the literal sense.”

“I remember this training project we were running in Ndwedwe, where I had two of my staff working. We used to use a magazine called *SONGOLOLO* as part of our training. It was a bilingual pictorial magazine, which we used to entertain learners when their teachers were busy in our workshops. This particular workshop coincided with the anniversary of Nelson Mandela’s freedom from incarceration. To commemorate this occasion, *SONGOLOLO* dedicated a biographical volume to him, with his picture on the cover. While this was happening, an inspector with the DET came to me quite agitated and appealed to me not to send trainers to the workshop because the *impis* were waiting for the trainers. Why? Because they believed that our two staffers were recruiting members for the ANC. I was summoned by the Inkata Institute and told quite firmly that if I wanted the projects to continue, I had to be non-partisan.”

“These four “revolutionaries” wanted to fight the revolution but they found it more comfortable fighting it in the boardroom of the organisation, rather than where it really mattered. ELET was a softer target, and it provided a foil to disguise the fact that they were not doing very much work. They had no real attachment or loyalty to the organisation. They were simply passing through ... they were weekend revolutionaries. I tried to persuade them that I was merely a conduit for donor funding. I wasn’t a capitalist who was responsible for the problems in the country and that there was no point in agitating against me. They didn’t want me to chair meetings. They wanted a rotating chair and I conceded. They wanted to be part of the agenda setting, and I conceded. The consequence of these concessions was that it became a laborious process and what would have taken an hour to accomplish, now took an entire day. A sense of laxity set in. People started coming late to work. I appealed for punctuality. They agreed on the importance of punctuality, but continued coming late to work. Things got completely out of control, and I became increasingly dictatorial. It became clear that this notion of open management or soft systems management became untenable. Before I took up the post of director at ELET, I had sacrificed a job as lecturer at a training college, because I had my own dreams and aspirations in the development field. I was not prepared to come in and suddenly allow myself to be relegated to a trainer by this gang of four, resulting in all my ideas being dissipated. So, I decided that I could no longer allow the situation to continue. When their contracts expired, we terminated their services.”

“What was happening in ELET was symptomatic of a general trend in the country where many NGOs were formed in response to the crisis. Prior to this period, universities had distanced themselves from what they regarded as the “band-aid” work of the development sector, which they regarded as colluding with the system. One of the factors that helped ELET survive while other NGOs died, was that I had the full support of the board of trustees. I think that without my own resolve coupled with the support of the trustees, ELET might have folded. They intervened quite often to endorse my position as director. Wells Ntuli, one of the trustees was particularly supportive. There was a time when the troublesome four formed a union and attempted to affiliate to NEHAU. They wanted to have meetings during working hours but I refused. I invited Wells Ntuli to the meeting and he pointed out to them that I had the option of not recognising the union because they did not have sufficient members to constitute a union. Out of a staff of 50, they were only four and did not warrant recognition as a union.”

*"So since that turbulent phase in terms of management relations and staff relations, have there been for you, any significant lessons?"*

"I think I learnt a few things. I learnt that I had to share management, but first I had to work with people who were prepared to share, people who were not so confrontational. This period of the 'rights culture' took a severe toll on ELET, and almost brought it to its knees. Fortunately, we came through this turbulent period more focussed and were able to hire new staff who were free of the struggle mentality and forward looking: People like Tracy, Cheron and others who are pragmatic and focussed, were not scarred by the revolution and share a democratic spirit that is not overly strident. These people might at that time have been accused of being technocratic. But yes, the experience taught me a few important lessons. I had never been in an NGO before and had come from a fairly bureaucratic system and I was on a learning curve. I have reaffirmed my belief that sometimes you need to take a decision unilaterally because waiting for consensus would result in your missing the tide to the disadvantage of everyone. I have never really had occasion to take unilateral decisions on any matter, but I reserve the right to do that when the need arises. For example, assume we are discussing the status of a project and everyone around believes that the project should be discontinued because it is not viable on the basis of cost and profitability. For me, the issue is not about evaluating short-term viability and profitability. If I have a sense that the project was a means towards achieving something bigger, I will motivate strongly for the project to be maintained. Of course, sometimes we take risks and make mistakes and that is part of the learning curve."

*"Tell me Mervin, how do you get other members of ELET to share the vision you have?"*

"One way of ensuring success in a project is to get people to believe in what they are doing. I allow people to generate ideas that they feel passionately about, help them to conceptualise the idea and then let them run with it. I then maintain a fairly distant oversight, acting as a sounding board when coordinators discuss the successes and problems associated with the projects. I keep track of the projects through regular reports, both formal and informal. We are also blessed at ELET with having generalists on the staff. People have the ability to assume different roles and portfolios. For example, Cheron is the coordinator of the language and learning project, but she is also the senior trainer of the PHASE project and develops curriculum materials for the tree project. They are being overworked, and possibly underpaid because we continue to be short changed by funders for the work we do. We have no money for things like staff development or upgrading our computers."

"We are victims of the new "Thatcherite philosophy" where we only get paid for the work we do, and we are expected to take care of the resourcing on our own. We are forced therefore to outsource some of the work such as materials development. However, we are also blessed in the sense that we have staff members who are developmentally sensitive. It has taken us several years to achieve that amidst our ups and downs. There were people who had different political agendas, which did get in the way of progress. Now we have a fairly young team supported by some senior personnel, especially women, who are altruistic and non-careerists and who enjoy their work. I suppose there will come a time when they will not be satisfied with job satisfaction alone."

"One of the hazards of the work we do is the danger of the language learning process degenerating into a facile indulgence. This happens when oral competence and fluency is emphasised regardless of content and form. On that level, fluency is emphasised at the expense of substance, and the rigour of form is neglected. It also leads to a degeneration of the communicative process, when structures are ignored and there is no progression from a simplistic interchange through the oral process to something more substantial. In this context, CLT is oversimplified to mean oral communication at the expense of developing other productive and cognitive skills. So, what you get as a consequence is children speaking confidently and competently but saying little that has any substance. A local journalist aptly calls this the production of 'confident illiterates'."

*"How would you respond to the allegation that as English Language Institute, you are losing focus of your mission?"*

"I think it is important to realise that we can no longer function with a narrow focus of promoting English as a language when the context is not supporting it. We have to acknowledge the existence of other variables that are undermining the effectiveness of our work. We cannot pretend to be functioning normally unless we address the contextual deficiencies that undermine the success of our efforts. Approaching language development in this way allows us to address a host of other social maladies. For instance, in dealing with a health and sanitation project, we challenge gender stereotypes. Whereas previously it was the responsibility and domain of the girls to fetch the water, now through the programme, we have succeeded in changing the cultural roles of men and women. The interesting thing is that they reflect on these issues and talk about it openly. We are also eroding certain cultural misnomers about health and fitness. One of the things we discovered is that when children had diarrhoea, they were given enemas as a remedy. This is quite absurd as this causes further dehydration and sometimes death. Through the programme, children learn what diarrhoea is and what it leads to and share this knowledge with their parents."

"Although we still have projects where we focus on improving children's proficiency in English, we have shifted our focus to the languages of learning, where we focus on improving access to learning through language. We have a pilot project with four schools where we focus on the language problems and how teachers are coping with this. We are focusing on what we call BIC: the Basic Interactional Competences together with the Cognitive Language Proficiencies (CLP). The focus has shifted towards language as tool for learning rather than focusing on developing competence in English alone as has been the case in the past. We now adopt a multilingual approach, looking at how language mediates learning."

*With the change in Government in the UK, there has been a shift in the policy of the Labour government away from funding language development. The emphasis is now on poverty alleviation and English is no longer the political fad. Since 1990, there has been a kind of rhetoric around the whole language debate. Their development wing used to be called the 'Overseas Development Administration' (ODA). It changed to a more partnership oriented 'Department for International Development' (DFID). The minister in charge has a very strong personal interest in the eradication of poverty but it was difficult for her to see how language education was going to alleviate poverty. So there was a greater emphasis on things like economic empowerment and health education. If you examine language policy documents, there is no reference to English. The new*

*flavour of the day is Language Literacy and Communication espousing the acceptance of the multiplicity of languages. The reality is that all of the documents are written in English. This in a sense gives English a kind of insidious force, a covert power, reaffirming its hegemony. No longer is it under attack as the language of the coloniser.*

*In the early years of ELET's life, they were in the fortunate position of offering a service that was really in great demand. English was the de facto official language as well as the medium of learning and teaching. Therefore, the language development courses were very marketable. Another reason for its relative success was that ELET enjoyed a very good relationship with its core funder, Anglo Vaal, who adopted a hands-on approach in terms of governance. The presence of the funder on the board of trustees gave ELET a sense of stability and certainty. This, coupled with a fairly simple message supported by strong governance, ensured its survival in a volatile market. Mervin reflects on ELET's strategic realignment:*

"The main reason why we have survived is that we have been able to reinvent ourselves to respond to changes in the country, strategically. We realised also that, internationally, there has been a shift in the mode of teaching English from a purist notion of teaching the language structurally, to using other modes of intervention and delivery. For instance, we realised that it was futile to begin teaching a language like English in contexts that were totally under-resourced. We had to acknowledge the contextual realities in which we were working as being a vital determinant of the success of our programmes. We had to take into account the poverty and undernourishment in these contexts. We had to consider the levels of health and sanitation. So we made a conscious choice to select the extremely poor and under-resourced schools in the remote rural areas where there was no proper sanitation and no running water. And in such contexts, it did not make sense to talk about the niceties of English when children's real experiences outside the classroom walls were quite disturbing, which in turn impacted on their ability to assimilate any form of teaching and learning. With this in mind, we designed the Project for Health and Sanitation Education. We turned our attention to devising a project to address the issues of health, sanitation and poverty. We discovered that there were several things that could be done, but we had to do it in a critical way, which would benefit the children. We used the action research approach with children engaging in project work. We called them action projects, where children identified a project, examined ways of addressing the problem, implemented a plan of action and then evaluated its success. We started with very simple projects such as fetching water from the river, proper sanitation practices like hand washing, cleaning toilets, cleaning classrooms, and tying these in with language. We did this through the medium of song and dance. I think that funders appreciated this, and consequently, the projects have been well funded, both by the European Union and USAID. Tracy together with Cheron designed the programme and Tracy is the programme manager".





## 5

## *When Dreams Transcend Realities*

*The atmosphere in The University of Durban Westville's boardroom is tense. Peter's rather gloomy but incisive prognosis of ELET's financial health takes us into the afternoon. His story is one that has been told a million times in a million boardrooms. Fiscal austerity, discipline, productivity: words that have a familiar ring, but which seem to belong in some other place. Michael has divided the team into working groups to explore and evaluate the different components of ELET's life. After a subdued discussion, which had none of the animated zeal of earlier discussions, Cecil the teacher development courses coordinator, is called on to synthesise his group's deliberations. Cecil is measured and deliberate in manner. There is a hint of melancholy in his voice as he reflects on the volatility of the cash flow from the professional development courses, as a result of fluctuating student numbers, unpredictable fee-generation and a myriad of other maladies which may be ascribed to a myriad of other factors, typical of a democracy that has allowed its myriad of dreams to transcend realities. Teboho, who throughout the proceedings has attended carefully to all the speakers, is visibly concerned by Cecil's comments. In her characteristically controlled and polite manner she fixes her gaze on Cecil.*

"Our stand, as trustees, is that we do not spend a cent until we have signed a contract. If we are to borrow from one project to subsidise another, it should be on an understanding that the money will be repaid on completion of the project. Unless we have signed guarantees, we do not touch work on the basis of a handshake. Think about running a shop. You run the shop to provide a service, and the more people entering the shop, the greater the chance of its survival. In the shop, you have various items. When people stop buying a particular item, you will have to make the tough decision of saying: I love the item, its colour, its look, but can I afford to continue keeping the item on my shelf if no one is buying it? I'm sorry if that sounds like a tough line, but if people are not paying for the courses, then ELET must make some tough decisions about the courses. Each one of us here, not just the managers, should be wearing a marketing hat, to promote the services we offer. If we still are not able to sell what we have to offer, we must stop selling it. If the courses are not profitable, we must discontinue them".

*Teboho's argument is compelling. It is not hard to see why she is chairperson of the board of trustees. However, Cecil is not impressed. In a somewhat agitated countenance he responds:*

"If this were a grocery shop, we would have closed it down a long time ago. But we are not a grocery shop. We offer teacher development courses. Our experience is that students may not pay up when we want the money, but in the end, just before graduation, they pay their dues. We've experienced financial crises before and we've bounced back. There is no reason to believe that we won't bounce back again".

*Cecil, in some senses represents the 'old guard' of NGO administrators: the optimist and the dreamer imbued with a strong humanitarian spirit, the one who would rather leave financial matters aside and focus on development issues. He is quite passionate about what he does, the tree planting project being close to his heart. Cecil believes that schools are 'very unlovely places'. They are bleak and gloomy, he says, and not always conducive to learning. His mission is to look at ways of improving the environment. One successful approach is the 'greening' of schools by planting indigenous trees and kindling a love for the environment in the community. Together with this, he has embarked on allied supportive projects such as removing alien plants that inhibit indigenous growth. The project encourages the holistic development of the environment by removing litter, landscaping and developing skills in maintaining the environment. This is done within the context of language development by integrating indigenous trees into literature, in poetry, using drama and role-play. But, as impressive as this sounds, an NGO cannot survive on passion alone, as Teboho again reminds us:*

"Cecil, you will have to convince me that what we collect from candidates and what we receive in the form of subsidies will enable us to run the course without getting into a deficit, so that when we collect outstanding fees in the end, it will result in a surplus. One day, we are going to get ourselves in trouble. As long as we run on deficits, we may find ourselves unable to deliver".

*The ability of NGOs to 'deliver' has largely been contingent upon the availability of one corporate funder or another for its funding. There were several NGOs which displayed similar characteristics and who have since been left to die because they failed to respond to changing realities. There has been a train of US funded projects that have died in the same way. During the period when they were funded, certain NGO personnel lived very comfortably, often extravagantly, without a strategy to sustain that lifestyle, and without a recognition that the comfort would not last forever. As a consequence of AngloVaal unbundling its subsidiaries, ELET, together with other organisations, which depended on AV for funding, faced the prospect of having its links completely severed. But as a result of Teboho's influence, AV decided to allow ELET a three-year period of grace, to wean itself out of the relationship of dependency it once had. Although AngloVaal no longer has an obligation to ELET, to expedite the process of changing its identity, the three companies made a new commitment to ELET. To ensure that ELET adjusted to the new climate, they agreed to share the funding equitably for three years, after which they would withdraw funding completely. The three-year period was to end in July 2001, two weeks from the date of this interview.*

*To date, the process of cutting the umbilical chord has been a very difficult one for ELET, who until the last annual budget continued to earmark funds expected from AV. For seventeen years, ELET would receive a cheque in July. They have become accustomed to this lifeline. It is only now that the reality of the inevitable has registered. ELET has submitted another proposal for AV to reconsider its decision to curtail core funding. Even if AV reconsiders its support, ELET will have to accept that AV does not*



*regard ELET in the same way as Clive Mennel did. For the new executives, ELET is just another of the projects that has historical links with the old AV from an era overtaken by the ravages of globalisation.*

*ELET's strategic planning meeting has begun to address some of the issues around ELET's changing identity. Questions that were raised about the accountant's salary, for instance, revealed that certain members were beginning to come to terms with issues of financial management, which were previously of no consequence, because AngloVaal was there to take care of finances. July 2001 marks a significant turning point in the history of ELET because, for the first time, ELET doesn't have a guaranteed source to fund its administration. ELET now has to make certain choices, as Teboho reminds us:*

"We do not have many options. We can choose to dismantle the administration structure and manage each project as a separate entity, and evaluate the success of that option, or, we need to recognise that an administrative structure is necessary, and that to support it, we need to work harder, create more work, and benefit from the advantage of an efficient support structure. Ultimately, we at AV must shoulder some of the responsibility for the slow pace of change at ELET. We have in the past rescued ELET from its financial difficulties, and if we continue to rescue it, we are not assisting in its growth, we are actually retarding it. For this reason, I have consistently been pushing for a stronger sense of independence. When AV asks me for advice on the kind of role they should continue to play, I am quite stubbornly pro-development. It is true that I have considerable influence over AV, and I could quite easily secure another three years of funding, but I have nothing to benefit from a disempowered ELET, and equally, I have nothing to benefit from a totally patronising AV."

"Having said that, despite the fact that some of the individuals in ELET have failed to make the necessary mind shift in terms of its dependency on AV, ELET has made remarkably rapid progress towards autonomy. Previously, ELET was reluctant to consider accepting government projects, perhaps because it did not fully conceive itself as a service provider. Even as other NGOs were capitalising on the opportunities offered by the emerging Departments of Education, ELET was under no compulsion to move out of its comfort zone. The fact that it has been able to move out of its comfort zone is a giant leap for ELET. This is an achievement that needs to be celebrated and supported and nudged further, with the acknowledgement that ELET will never become fully self-sufficient. It is an NGO and NGOs by definition are not in a position to achieve self-sustaining profitability."

"I think that it is important that we maintain dreamers like Cecil and it is perfectly reasonable that there will be people who will not be comfortable with the new rationality. We do need to keep the dreams alive, but with a consciousness of the reality we ultimately have to face. There were times when an organisation would fall into the crevice and some Good Samaritan would come along and rescue it. The days of organisations bouncing back because of good Samaritans are forever gone. These days organisations bounce back because they respond creatively and strategically to their predicaments. Today we no longer have the comfort of expecting a lifeline every time we are in trouble. We have to dream with the consciousness that at the end of the month we will have to pay the rent or face eviction. We cannot sit back smugly hoping that we will bounce back as we always have."

"We must remember that the perceived 'crisis' in the development sector is not confined to NGOs. The grant-making sector in general has changed dramatically. Corporate donors are becoming circumspect about how and to whom they disburse their funds. For instance, a civil engineering company will question the logic of funding early childhood development when its own human resource needs are not being addressed. They are now saying, let's drop all funding unrelated to civil engineering and focus on training skilled civil engineers. By the time the engineering company funds the various sectors associated with developing skilled engineers, there are no funds for an institution like ELET with its focus on language development, even though language development is in itself a crucial component of development."

"Perhaps we should examine the history of AngloVaal to illustrate the point I am making. There was a time when AV was corporate with multiple interests including mining, steel, glass, food and rubber. It was quite common for one of the subsidiaries to cross-subsidise the other when the markets were unfavourable. In the nineties, when the gold markets were in decline, there were voices within AV who said that they had always bounced back with the help of subsidiaries and they would bounce back again. What was happening on the outside was that the investor was speaking with a different voice. The investor was beginning to question why she should lock her investment in one corporate venture that used its profits to cross-subsidise another less profitable venture. It therefore made sense for investors to place their interests in dedicated companies that did not have to manage the baggage of multiple subsidiaries. It took a family corporate giant seventy years to make the painful decision to restructure and unbundle. The new AV is a product of that new rationality which requires companies to focus on their operations, be mindful of their limitations, and exploit their potential within the confines of their resources. This is not peculiar to AV. The majority of corporates internationally have gone through this experience. Anglo American has done it. Billiton has done it. It is really about exercising a few basic business principles: Prune what you don't need, acknowledge that there are limitations to what you are able to handle and temper your dreams with the reality that to survive, NGOs will increasingly have to operate on the same principles as successful business."

"Having said that, I believe in ELET's capacity as an NGO and its potential in making a contribution to the country, because of the many committed individuals within the institution. We cannot expect all members to have the same ideas on how the organisation should be run and I see this kind of dissent as healthy and desirable. We all bring different kinds of experiences to the organisation. The ideal is to bring those diverse ideas together so that something productive emerges. I am happy to say that we do have that productive energy in ELET. As trustees, we have had, despite our reluctance, to allow the organisation to take certain risks. For me there has to be a balance between taking risks and maintaining accountability and responsibility, and for this reason, I will continue to ask difficult questions, sometimes appearing to be conservative. Perhaps I have been influenced by my experiences in the business sector. Business does not take chances and risks unless it has measured the probability of success against a background of knowing the implications of failure. Together with this, we need to abandon the spirit of entitlement (which some NGOs are guilty of) and adopt a spirit of entrepreneurship where every individual within the organisation adopts a corporate ethic and works to promote the interest of the whole organisation rather than individual interests."

*There is a muted silence in the boardroom, with all eyes fixed on Teboho, as if members were expecting her to continue with her discourse on economic pragmatism. But she says nothing more. Nothing more needs to be said. Her message is unambiguous, concise and powerful and there is little in her views that anyone in the room could fundamentally contest. As if driven by some primordial instinct, we look at our wristwatches. It is 5 p.m., the end of another difficult day.*



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## 6

## *Unlocking the mode of Dissent and Resistance*

*The change from the glorious sunshine of Durban to the cold blasts of winter in the Johannesburg city centre is severe. Several trips around the towering buildings of Main Street, in search of street parking, brings me to a 'parkade' two blocks from my destination. The cold numbs my face and fingers as I walk up to number 56 Main Street, a tall, building clad in black marble, an imposing façade. This is the home of one of the country's most powerful corporate giants: AngloVaal Industries, the co-founder of ELET. As I walk through the towering glass doors, a security officer greets me and offers to help. I announce the purpose of my visit and he points me to a seat in the foyer.*

*The interior of the building is as opulent as the exterior. Lavish wooden furnishings complemented by supple leather, enhances the image of corporate magnitude. I sink gratefully into the ample couch and pull out my interview schedule, which I designed the previous night. I must admit that I was impressed, no, awed by Teboho when I met her at the strategic planning meeting earlier in Durban. I was particularly impressed by her clarity of thought, the simplicity of her speech and the sheer gravity of her arguments. When I asked whether she would allow me to interview her, she graciously consented and so, combining work with pleasure, I decided to take a bit of an escapade with my family while in Johannesburg.*

*As I scrutinise the interview schedule, a familiar cheery voice greets me. I look up and it is Teboho. She is a beautiful woman. Today, her beauty is accentuated by the long braids that rest softly on her shoulders. We exchange greetings and she enquires about my stay in Johannesburg as we walk up the stairs to the coffee shop where she seats me at a table and goes to the coffee machine. The coffee shop is deserted. I test my audio recorder in preparation for the interview. She returns with the coffee and we chat a little about the Johannesburg winter and her forthcoming holiday at the Durban Coast. I am acutely aware of her busy schedule and therefore eager to cram as much of my interview as possible in the time I have with her. I begin the interview by reflecting on the role of the NGO movement which was fairly active in the pre-1994 era, and since then, its role has come under scrutiny and critique. I allude to policy analysts such as Jonathan Jansen & John Gultig's accusation that NGOs are ineffective and a drain on financial resources. I ask whether she subscribes to this critique?*

"No I don't. I think that before 1994, the NGO movement provided *THE* alternative to an illegitimate government, illegitimate not just to us as South Africans, but also to the broader international community. The attempt to reach the grassroots of communities that were in need of intervention was as a consequence of NGO initiatives. At that stage there was a fairly insignificant culture of community based activity, which effectively fought the struggle against the state. There was a space for the NGO movement that could play a dual role by leading the struggle while, at the same time, providing developmental leadership. I'm not sure whether these two components are in fact separate, or part of the same continuum. The NGO movement played a key role as an alternative and as a conduit for donor funding and resources (both local and international) that were directed at development. In the post 1994 era, I don't think the issue is whether they are relevant, or whether they are a drain on the resources. It is about everyone, the NGOs included, recognising the need for a changed and changing role. Where we have failed as the NGO movement is interpreting what its new role is. For many years, NGOs were *THE* alternative, to a point that the alternative became the mainstream. People entrench themselves into a particular system and when circumstances change and there is a need to shift into the real mainstream, whatever that mainstream is, there is resistance. People who have been in the alternative, who now have to find a new role, tend to struggle with making that shift. It would appear to me that because NGOs were central to the whole development agenda in this country, they *expect* that the mainstream should come to them, rather than them joining the mainstream. Now we face a situation where funders and donors regard the democratic government as legitimate (whether it actually delivers or not) and find it more appropriate and proper to work with the government directly rather through the NGO movement."

"In the past, we had policies developed by government, which we all rejected, and we had an alternative agenda being promoted by the NGOs, both sharing a parallel but confrontational relationship. With the installation of a democratic government, we have policies that are democratically developed and therefore acceptable to wider civil society as well as to the NGO movement. However what we see is that there is a tendency for the NGO movement to continue running parallel to the state rather than aligning themselves with the state and in fact becoming a delivery mechanism for the state rather than the opposition. I don't think the NGOs are a drain on resources, but I do think that unless the NGOs make the necessary shift, they will become a burden on the state and on its resources. In the absence of legitimate structures in the pre-94 era we had thousands of NGOs because the need was real and therefore their presence was justified. Circumstances have changed, and it would be reasonable to expect that there should be fewer, focussed and highly efficient NGOs. It was also acceptable at one time for NGO's to exist as alternative employment agencies. We need to acknowledge this reality and we need to be mature enough to acknowledge that there is a need to re-evaluate our roles in an emerging democracy, and to concede that the work we set out to do has been completed, and that it is time to bow out gracefully. It was perfectly acceptable to represent the voices of dissent then, but I'm not sure that this country can afford to continue listening to those voices of dissent. Yes, there are NGOs who have not been able to reconfigure their roles who are a drain on the country, but there are many who are not necessarily promoting the government agenda, but who are positioning themselves as effective delivery mechanisms. We need to accept that we have a government, which has a will, but no capacity to enact that will. We need to accept that a creative synergy



between the state and the NGO could speed delivery. One needs to look at the success stories of partnerships between the NGO and state and private sector collaborating for effective and sustainable delivery and monitoring.”

*Teboho's views on the NGO world are quite revealing. It is interesting how our view of events is often shaped by academic common sense. The literature on the NGO movement in this country is so limited, that what we have inherited is a set of self-perpetuating myths which are difficult to shrug off. Teboho's critique of the NGO sector is balanced by a defence of its legitimacy. The literature suggests that many influential NGO's have been marginalized by the state and that although they possessed capacity to fast track state initiatives, they were actually allowed to die untimely deaths. I ask Teboho whether, in her experience as a development consultant, this is true.*

“I don't think so. I do think that many have died because they failed to make the switch at the time that they needed to do so. I think that it would be unfair to expect that government's role and responsibility would be to sustain an NGO. NGOs need to reinvent and sustain themselves and to position themselves as possible partners with government. Some NGOs have come into this era with an arrogance that comes from their powerful positions in the pre-democratic era. Now, they expect and demand to be elevated to the status of some sort of subsidiary body of the state. Because this did not materialise, we have all sorts of accusations being levelled. Several NGOs were forced to fold because they sat back and expected that the state would approach them to extend an invitation to collaborate. Government could not, would not and should not do that. The NGOs set themselves up without government's help in the past, why should they now expect government to prop them up now? We must remember that just as many NGOs have died, many new ones were born, and they are doing well. The state does have a responsibility to create an enabling environment for development work, but I don't think its responsibility extends to propping up individual organisations. If the environment towards NGOs was so hostile, all of the successful NGOs presently in service would not survive. I think the real issue here is one of the expectations that NGOs had about themselves in relation to the state rather than their being marginalized. When you have an expectation, and when what you expect is not delivered, the chances are that you will interpret this as sabotage... when all that happened is that your expectations were not met.”

*Historically, NGOs were powerful voices in articulating dissent. The advent of democracy in SA raises the question of whether there is still a space for that dissenting voice, as a monitor of the state, its policies and its capacity to deliver. Do we have space for dissenting voices in a fledgling democracy? Do these voices subvert the project for the realisation of the democratic ideal? What exactly is the role of an NGO in a democratic state?*

“Certainly there is lots of room for the voices of dissent. But, one needs to distinguish between the dissent then and the dissent now. Because there was a concerted attempt then to topple an illegitimate government, there were lots of spaces for noises. I do think that this country has outgrown that phase. We have outgrown dissent for the sake of dissent. We are now in an era when dissent needs to be based on a different ethic. It needs to be based on a challenge to the government on its delivery. The NGOs with their experience and expertise are in an ideal position to do that in a constructive way. There are many NGOs, which are prepared to roll up their sleeves and assist with delivery, but

there are also many that are locked in the mode of dissent and resistance, continuing to challenge because that's what they are accustomed to doing. When it comes to the crunch, of having to deliver, they are as bad as those they criticise. While I don't want to generalise, there is a tendency for individuals within the NGO sector to be overly concerned about their jobs. If we could all, whether we are within the NGO sector, on the outside, see ourselves as development practitioners, and focus on our primary mission to assist with development at grassroots, then we can start making intelligent noises, and generating intelligible critique that is less concerned with where the next pay cheque is coming from. I'm not suggesting that the kind of dissent we experienced then was not intelligent, I am saying that dissent is relative to the context, and the context *has* changed."

*"Has the context changed, really? Perhaps it has. I don't know! Perhaps it is one of those grand narratives of modern democracy: 'If you are not with us, you are against us'. What I do know, intuitively, is that the voices of dissent should never be muted. It is, as it was for William Shakespeare, 'The Star to Every Wandering Bark, whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken'<sup>37</sup>. Am I time's fool, hankering after a forbidden dream? Perhaps I am. But, in muting my dissident voice, is there not the inherent danger of an individual's or an institution's autonomy being compromised, of buying into a particular brand of state rationality, and as a consequence, being blind and deaf to the excesses of the state?"*

"I'm not suggesting that an NGO has to buy into a government's ideology. NGOs, with their collective experience are in a favourable position to influence policy. If NGOs, as a result of their experience, detect that the state formulates policies that are not practical and do not serve the interest of people, then to me, their dissent is an expression of their autonomy. Once again, the NGO is in a position to experiment with alternative models and to provide alternative possibilities for the state. It is essential therefore that they preserve their autonomy in relation to the state, to be flexible and adventurous, but in a constructive way. There needs to be a fundamental shift in mindsets: from desiring to topple a government to one that acknowledges that a government needs to be supported in its developmental goals. This does not imply that their autonomy has to be compromised because NGOs are service-providers and service-providers are not necessarily married to those they service. As a service provider, you agree on the terms, deliver as expected and retain your capacity to explore and experiment."

*NGOs in developing countries are sometimes restricted in their activities by their relationship with the state. In attempting to preserve their independence, NGOs are often reluctant to work with the host country government fearing that their freedom would be compromised. Conversely, governments are sometimes suspicious of NGO motives, perceiving them as subversive. In South Africa, historically, the word 'non' in 'Non Governmental Organisation' is predicated on the notion of a relationship of contestation and conflict between NGO and state. Should the NGO revisit their 'idealised' roles of contestation and resistance? Should their identities be reconfigured to evince a cooperative relationship with the state?*

"It is important that the 'non' be preserved as such, but there needs to be a fundamental shift in mindsets rather than dabble in cosmetic changes. There is a need to see the 'non'

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<sup>37</sup> From William Shakespeare's sonnet "Let me not to the marriage of true minds"

in NGO not as oppositional but as the alternative. If we conceive of the State, the NGO movement and civil society as occupying three separate boxes, then individuals within the NGO box need to reorientate themselves to recognise that if at one stage in their lives they faced north, they now perhaps need to start facing south. Actually, they need to recognise that they can no longer have the luxury of facing in one direction only and that they will have to constantly reconfigure themselves in a flexible way later on. It is no longer simply adopting the either/or binary: of being pro- or anti- government, it is about orienting oneself towards a goal-directed delivery system."

*Despite the shift in their perceived roles from "do gooders" to "good doers", NGOs are still regarded islands of success in a sea of poverty. In concrete terms, what does this mean for an NGO? What are the compelling imperatives that NGOs need to engage with in material ways to change their identities?"*

"They need to re-examine their programmes, maintain a focus on achieving goals and on delivery. It means that organisations will have to re-examine their sustainability and how they resource their intended activities. It is about NGOs needing to define their relationships with everyone, including their relationship to the state and civil society. This also calls for some degree of specialisation. NGOs cannot be fish and chips shops, being everything to everyone. NGOs now have to operate on exactly the same principles as businesses. The experience of Anglo Vaal is an appropriate example: AV was once involved in mining, in the food sector, into the manufacture of tyres, glass, steel etc. The AV of today is focused on mining only. This allows you to focus and channel your energies in a more disciplined way and to excel in the process. So to begin with, NGOs need to engage in some self-analysis, to establish what their mission is, and how this fits in with the broader needs of the country, and then to start examining issues of resources, delivery and sustainability within this context. We should remember that we will not go back to the good old days, because those days were borne out of struggle and strife."

*"In most developing countries, NGOs focus on the poorest segments of society, which do not benefit from governmental services. NGO intervention in these contexts attempts to enable disadvantaged communities to share more fully in the benefits of development. In this regard, NGOs have been associated as being bastions of humanitarianism with the mission to respond to struggle and strife. This image of NGO identity is being eroded, as NGOs in South Africa face a crisis of credibility since the state has now taken over service delivery functions previously provided by the NGO movement. Since the political and economic context has changed, should NGOs abandon their humanitarian mission and move on?"*

"No we don't! We need to recognise that what we did in the past was determined by the fact that there was an absence of that humanitarian ethic from the state. When we find that the state is not delivering in a humanitarian way, we need to be vocal about our concerns. But what we need to abandon is the confrontational approach and the fixation with oppositional politics. That is not to suggest that we should abandon opposition. The fabric of a democracy is dependent on a strong voice of opposition. Our fixation on showing up the state needs to be replaced by a genuine attempt by NGOs to create an enabling environment for all sectors to make a contribution to development. Within that enabling environment it is quite possible for us to preserve our separate identities and work together as separate families towards common goals."



*"I do think we need to acknowledge that there are a large number of NGOs who carry out their mission with integrity. However, the idiom: "A few rotten apples can spoil the barrel", seems appropriate. Part of the problem, is that the vaulted status of NGOs makes them more susceptible than other types of organisations to public disillusionment. Salamon 1995:15 in Gibelman, M, 2000 alludes to the myth of the pure virtue within the nonprofit sector and a certain romanticism about its inherent purity, about its distinctive virtues. This is particularly true of the recent Allan Boesak saga in which he, in his capacity as director of the NGO was accused of misappropriating millions of Rands in donor funds. The public image of the third sector has been tarnished by these revelations. Such revelations contribute to the perception, supported by the media, that the NGO sector is in crisis. Is it in crisis?"*

"The NGO sector as a whole is not in a crisis. It is up and running very well. There are several complaints about the scarcity of resources. When we fail to accept that resources will always be scarce, we tend to generalise about crises. Yes, some organisations are experiencing a crisis in funding. But a crisis in funding experienced by some NGOs does not constitute general crisis in the sector. Funding is indeed a crucial element in the life of an NGO, but it is more crucial that NGOs start looking at the whole notion of best practice amongst one another, and to locate models of success. There are several NGOs that have survived and are now sustaining themselves legitimately. I am not referring to the NGOs that write glossy proposals and get money from their buddies through the back door, but the many who are doing a hard day's work and sustaining themselves. So, to me, the NGO sector is not under siege. What has happened is that whereas at one stage, there were 10 NGOs servicing the same population and doing the same thing, those have now been reduced to 2.

A practical example is the career guidance sector in which I worked. Nationally there were at least 21 NGOs that were members of an association that was promoting career guidance, and 10 at least in Gauteng. Very few of these were located in remote areas. Most of them were in the greater metropolitan region within a hundred-kilometre radius from each other trying to address the same needs. What happens in this context is that the NGOs target the same funders for their finances and you have the situation of 21 individual organisations, as well as the NGO association, competing for funding. Ultimately, you end up with the funder having to make choices about where it puts its money. There is a fine line between maintaining one's identity as an organisation and acknowledging that there comes a time when you have to agree to bid strategically for scarce resources. It does not make sense to maintain expensive infrastructures to support organisations doing the same thing for the same constituency. It does make sense to share and make optimal use of resources while targeting a wider range of constituencies. For some strange reason, NGOs believe that they have not fulfilled their mission unless they have done it in Soweto, and then we are surprised when they collapse."

*Teboho has a long-career history in the NGO world.-There was a stage in her life when she made a conscious decision to cross the line from the NGO world into the corporate world. I asked whether her worldview changed when she crossed that line.*

"It did. When I was in the NGO sector, I was anti-capitalist. I never thought I'd ever cross the line. I saw corporates as vultures waiting for opportunities to exploit. I hated the way they funded development, and felt that they had no understanding of how the other sector worked. To them, development was an act of charity. It was something they

did to ease their social consciences. As an NGO, we would write proposals, and pour our hearts out on the issues that needed to be addressed. The corporate boss would write you a cheque and never bother about what you did with the money. I was very critical of that. I thought it was a waste and vowed never to be part of that. When I was eventually asked to move into the corporate sector, I realised that it was one thing to be critical from the outside, it was quite another to be critical in a constructive way. My mission was to see if I could exert an influence to make the corporate sector more developmental and to demonstrate more interest in the organisations they funded. Whether I have actually achieved that mission, I am not yet sure. But I do know that I have made a contribution in the way I've influenced the corporates I represent to view development."

"I soon realised that there was nothing monstrous about the corporate sector in the way I had anticipated it. While the corporate sector is quite distinct from the NGO sector, I began to see the similarities and differences between them and began to respect both sectors for what they were, without adopting a holier than thou position on either sector. When I was in the NGO sector, it was *THE* place to be. We were the custodians of the liberation of our people. We wanted to change the country and everyone else was the problem. In particular, the government was a problem, and the corporate sector was the problem. So, when I moved into the corporate sector, I carried with me much of the baggage from the NGO world. However when you see things from the other side, the view is quite different."

*What about coming to terms with the new reality of the corporate world. As one who had come with a strong developmental ethic, I asked whether she was comfortable with buying into the capitalist ethic of the other side.*

"I don't think I *bought* into the other side. I learnt to respect it. I started to see it as different parts of the same cycle. In the same way that I had always looked at the corporate sector with critical lenses, when you turn the critical gaze on the NGO's you see that neither is perfect and that we are all trying to make sense of the same imperfect world. In the initial stages, I found it extremely difficult, having to constantly justify my association with the corporate world, but gradually learnt to live with the choice I had made. It has helped me understand the flaws and the beauty inherent in both sides."

*Our interview is interrupted by the sound of Teboho's cell phone ringing. As she answers the call, I recall an article by Steven Burkeman, a consultant to Interfund, entitled 'An unsatisfactory company...?' in which he delightfully explores the relationship between funders and recipients. He quips that when he goes to parties and someone asks "What do you do for a living?" he usually says something along the lines of "I help to give money away - someone else's money." The reply is normally original and witty, along the lines of "Could I have some, please?" This stimulating exchange perhaps reveals more about the sadness of his social life than he intended, but it also illustrates something quite important- When money enters into social relationships, it distorts them. But what is it about philanthropy and charity? Why do the wealthy give away their money? We know that AngloVaal was responsible, as a core funder, for the launch and development of ELET, but why should a major corporate fund a language development NGO?*

"When ELET was launched by the Urban Foundation and AngloVaal, the idea was to assist young people develop proficiency in English in a context where their mother tongue was not English, where they were being taught by teachers whose mother tongue



was not English. The rationale for its developmental approach was that if you addressed the teachers' knowledge and ability to use the language, you would then improve their ability to mediate the subject matter more effectively to their learners. Ultimately it was responding to the shortage in skilled human resources. Typical of the times, NGOs would either be funded by local agencies such as AngloVaal or be funded from outside the country. Certain individuals, in particular, Clive Mennel and Basil Hersov within AngloVaal were instrumental in the conceptualisation of ELET as a language NGO, contributing to the development of skilled human resources. These two individuals were highly attuned to developmental issues. In fact, Clive Mennel contributed to the launch of the Urban Foundation. ELET became just *one* of the projects the Urban Foundation supported. Their initiatives may now be criticised as a liberal response to more serious systemic issues, but it was a genuine attempt to address what they considered to be a crucial issue. I also have reservations about some of the decisions taken, but one cannot just discount the genuineness of the efforts by branding them as liberal. Obviously, we all have different opinions on how the struggle should have been fought, and that was their response to the struggle."

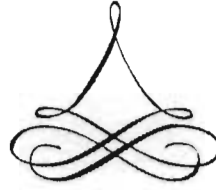
"ELET's existence, until recently, depended almost entirely on AngloVaal. ELET was virtually a subsidiary of AngloVaal. The staff of ELET was part of AV's payroll. At one stage Mervyn's office was in one of AngloVaal's subsidiaries, Bakers Bread. At one stage, almost everything that ELET did had to be sanctioned by AV. That was the nature of the relationship. That situation changed only during my term as chair of the ELET board. When I came into AV, it was in the process of restructuring their operations. Bakers Bread LTD (BB) was one operation that they decided to dispose of, and BB became part of Associated Biscuits. At that stage the Durban office of AV, housing Bakers LTD as well as ELET became redundant and for the first time, ELET had to grapple with issues of funding and salaries. In the past AV made all of the management decisions pertaining to conditions of employment and salaries. So in that sense ELET was forced to change by default. In the context of restructuring, there was no possibility of AV offering ELET the same kind of support it was accustomed to. It was a business decision. ELET at that stage was not, in the true sense, an NGO. It was in effect a subsidiary of AV. The autonomy you spoke about earlier did not exist. ELET belonged to AngloVaal. A senior person from AV chaired it. If he decided that ELET should act in a particular way (I am not suggesting he did), I doubt anyone would have challenged him. For me that was a problem. It was also a problem because ELET had not learnt to manage its own affairs. Mervyn did not have to worry about managing people, AV did that for him. When the relationship with Bakers LTD ended, and Clive Mennel was no longer able to run ELET as chair any longer, there was that period when things at ELET were very unsettling. There was also a problem in that ELET's fund raising was erratic and low-keyed. Actually, they did not need to, because if they had a deficit, AV would cover it. If ELET ran over budget, or had a major shortfall, the management would not be unduly concerned about it because AV would guarantee salaries and make good the deficits. ELET had no sustainable reserves; and this became apparent when Bakers was no longer there to top up the reserves. As a result, ELET had to dip into its reserves to fund itself. What we have as a consequence is that we sit at Board meetings not having a clear indication of where the following month's payroll would come from."

"ELET would sporadically find work and earn an income from it, but if there was no additional income, it would be of no consequence. At that stage, offering the language courses was the only work that ELET did, and that too did not attract any income since

the courses were offered free of charge. The courses were later accredited by Cambridge, which accorded the certificate with a certain amount of status, but there was no logical follow through of asking, for instance: 'now that you have this certificate, what are you doing with it?' There was no way of establishing what really was achieved beyond providing teachers with certificates and keeping people employed in ELET. For me, the dependency syndrome between AV and ELET was a major problem. It was a serious concern for me that Mervin could not as executive director take a decision without having it ratified by AV. Its autonomy as an NGO was seriously compromised as a result of its dependence on AV."

"However, I do think that ELET has since done well in attempting to free itself from the dependency syndrome. In order to achieve this, ELET had to find new ways of generating funds through diversifying its programmemes. From an organisation that was 100% dependent on donor funding from a single source, it has succeeded in generating substantial levels of its own resources quite rapidly within a short space of time. This remarkable shift, which ELET has been successful in making, is a shift, which many NGOs have failed to make, and have paid the price for it. ELET's ability to survive was assured because it recognised the need to grow itself out of the cocoon provided by AV, and to redefine its role. The issue of language was also central to the organisation having to redefine its role. There was an increasing realisation that it was one thing to fund teachers on a language course, it was quite another to actually make a serious impact on the teachers' practice in the classroom. There was also a realisation that it was no longer viable to fund a two-year course for only 20 students, located within one province. There was a realisation that the course had to permeate classrooms where teachers had no access to the courses. There was a need to move away from the focus on formal accreditation to short term intervention programmemes. The shift was inevitable, but some of us provided the push that was necessary to begin the process of asserting its own identity. Although we initiated the process around 1998, it was only taken seriously when AV began the process of unbundling its companies. It was in effect only three years ago that the AV that launched ELET ceased to exist and disappeared as a conglomerate. In its place, three new companies have emerged: AV Mining, AV Industries and AV Engineering: all of which are independent of the parent company and owe no allegiance to each other, other than the historical links and the links with personalities who are still there as major shareholders."

*It's been more than two hours since we entered the coffee shop. Our solitude is marred by the sounds of a multitude of voices that pour into the shop wearing various emotional countenances, from amusement to exasperation. Perhaps they have been in a controversial meeting. We cannot continue the interview and so we say our goodbyes and agree to meet again.*



## 7

## *Life is a Ballroom Dance*

“Life is a ballroom dance. You have to be in tune and in harmony with your partner. The man provides the information through his body, about which direction to take and what steps follow. As the woman, you receive the information and respond. Although technically the man “leads”, you transfer the energy constantly. There is this ball of energy between man and woman - one minute the man has it, the next minute the woman has it. The man is like a riverbed - he channels and directs where the woman goes. The woman is the water - the energy that goes through the river. Ballroom dance involves some fairly traditional roles but in a way, I quite enjoy that. I can allow myself to be very receptive and to instructions! This is unlike the work situation where I have to be assertive, make decisions and challenge decisions. On the dance floor, there is no room to challenge the instructions you get from your partner. It’s my way of getting in touch with my feminine side. It is a challenge to a relationship - there is no space for fights and quarrels. You don’t blame each other and you learn quickly to work things out and come to terms with your differences. I suppose the dance floor principle could apply to all elements of life. We often feel, when something happens to us, we need to transfer blame. This can easily happen on the dance floor - when a step doesn’t feel right, you are inclined to blame it on your partner. Another way of dealing with the problem is to say: Maybe the problem is with you, or maybe it is with me. The source of the problem is not important. What is important is being able to work together in solving the problem. It is a philosophy that I’d like to apply to my work although I’m not sure that I always succeed.

*From this elegant metaphor, it is not difficult to surmise that beneath the aura of the powerful, efficient and focussed manager of the PHASE programme lies the gentle artist. Tracy’s background is in the fine arts. Having graduated from high school, Tracy studied at the University of Pietermaritzburg in KZN, after which she spent a year at the Natal Technikon doing a course on illustration and visual communication. She was then employed by a graphics design agency for three years, where much of the work she did was for NGOs. She found it immensely more enjoyable than commercial projects and this is where she was first introduced to NGOs and decided that this was the environment she wanted to work in. She was then offered a job at ELET as graphic designer responsible for the production of publications. ELET had been awarded the contract to develop the materials for the ‘Thousand Schools Project’, which generated a huge demand for teaching and learning materials leaving Tracy with little time to think of anything else. But working with the books soon became something of a production line routine. She didn’t get too many opportunities to do intellectually challenging work. She*



was able to churn out hundreds of illustrations for these books and when the project came to an end, the challenge was to market these books to schools. For Tracy, the end of the project heralded an acute personal crisis, acute because she had to evaluate her role within ELET. There certainly was lots of work with the new projects, but she was getting terribly bored. The work no longer excited her and was becoming a routine that she no longer enjoyed. The dilemma was that, on the one hand, she had a job, and so she'd have to make herself useful, on the other hand, she wanted a new challenge. At a personal level, that's where the PHASE project was born. As a team, they decided that it was time to expand into other organisations, to optimise their publications capacity by offering their expertise to other NGOs.

Tracy's artistic spirit permeates her office space. Photographs, pictures and quotations on walls provide a collage of creative energy counterbalanced by the less inspiring shelf of box-files containing a treasure cove of data on the various projects she pioneered. Tracy's enthusiasm and energy is muted by her somewhat soft and subdued voice, careful not to attribute inordinate importance to herself. Preferring to be self-effacing instead, she reflects on the early days of the PHASE project.

Tracy recounted fondly how the idea of the PHASE project germinated as she and Jane Jackson were engaged in producing ELET materials. Jane had begun exploring the notion of "projectising" English, through a newspaper project, as part of Cheron's attempt at investigating the teaching of English in a multicultural context. Using the newspaper as a stimulus, teachers were encouraged to generate various issues around health and sanitation. At around that time, the Mvula Trust, which channelled European Union funds to water and sanitation projects around the country together with the Umgeni Water Board, were building toilets in schools. They felt that it was not sufficient to simply install the toilets, but that it was important for children to be educated in the use of them as well as in the broader issues of sanitation, water conservation and the prevention of waterborne diseases. The manager felt that there was a need for an education component to the programme because much of their efforts were devoted to the technical and infrastructural aspects of building toilets and sanitation without a necessary educative component in the use and maintenance of these facilities. Tracy, who was then graphic designer and materials developer, approached the Mvula Trust who asked her to design a programme on the use of the toilets and general sanitation. This was an ideal opportunity and Tracy saw this as a useful action project for English teachers who were already schooled in Communicative Language Teaching. They could use their training as an interface for the health project. Now, the project has been expanded to cover 550 schools in KZN, involving not just English teachers, but employing a multidisciplinary approach.

"So at that stage, that was really what the PHASE programme was about. We would like *NOW* to associate the programme with loftier goals by emphasising the importance of the context-in-which learning takes place, but that is something of a PC justification of how we started out with the project. At that stage, I suppose the real justification was securing one's job."

This is this kind of brutal honesty that characterises Tracy's management style. She admits that when she started with thirty schools in Ndawede, Mapumulu and Umbumbulu, she soon realised that this project was very different from the other projects she was accustomed to at ELET. For the first time, she worked with

*organisations she had not worked with before, with health and sanitation provision, infrastructural issues, issues of physical planning and issues of community involvement in education projects. It was a new experience from the usual sedentary office-based work. Although she did not have any particular interest in health and sanitation prior to that experience, she had the capacity to cultivate an interest in it fairly quickly, especially since it dealt with social and human issues. She reflects on the "horrificing" conditions, which she witnessed at the beginning. She admits to have seen worse since, but at that stage, it was an 'eye opener' for her.*

"As we got involved in the programme, it became clear that for many of the teachers in these schools, their focus was not on health and sanitation. Just looking at the condition of the toilets made you wonder how these children coped with them. Compounding the problem was the absence of running water. There was no water to drink let alone for washing hands. It was really a challenge for me to focus and come to terms with what were essentially basic human needs, which were quite easy to overlook if you were outside of the context."

*There are two features of PHASE, which I think are particularly valuable. One is that learners are participants in the learning process and the learning environment, an ideal that OBE is trying to achieve, and an ideal that ELET has come a long way in achieving. This approach is useful because learners are themselves involved in investigating the problems associated with their environment actively rather than being recipients of information they do not identify with. This approach resonates with the World Health Organisation's (WHO's) child-to-child approach that affirms children's inherent capacity to teach each other and to effect changes in their communities. The other valuable contribution the programme is making is that teachers are receiving OBE training through hands-on experience with a learner-centred programme as a way of grasping the principles of OBE in a practical, contextually relevant and illuminating way. It is always very rewarding to listen to the "ah ha" experiences of teachers who excitedly announce that they finally understand what the whole business of OBE was about and for Tracy this is an indicator of the effectiveness of the programme.*

"The effectiveness of the programme is particularly apparent when you consider that it focuses on such important real life issues rather than contrived, hypothetical scenarios often found in textbooks. It is important for teachers to receive academic training, but this project focuses on the conditions under which training takes place. In all of the sites we have intervened, most schools have really rallied behind our programme because they see what a remarkable difference the project makes in communities. There seems to be a realisation that effective learning cannot take place in conditions where children are plagued by waterborne diseases and the lack of sanitation. It's also about valuing children as human beings, and the environment we create for them sends out this signal about how they fit into society, which in turn affects their self esteem and how they perform."

*What the PHASE programme does, is to commit firmly to improving the environment for learners in tangible ways... now, rather than waiting for some superior force to come in and initiate change. In the process of improving the environment, learners acquire real life skills in the form of cooperative learning, group work, and project processes through active research. Children learn to identify problems, investigate solutions and develop action plans. To do this, they design and conduct interviews with peers, teachers and*



*community members. So you can see how, in the process of solving actual problems, they learn a host of communication and research skills.*

“We have worked, to a large extent, with language teachers on this project because there is a strong communications base in the programme and also because the language curriculum is more flexible and linked to research skills. The programme could very well be done through the medium of Zulu, but the focus of the programme is to develop English language skills in practical ways to enable learners to learn the language in a contextually real and relevant way rather than through the more abstract and disembodied way that language is often taught. My honours degree in cultural and media studies has influenced the way in which I relate to issues of social development. My research there, through a case study, focussed on participatory forms of communication. The whole notion of participatory communication has become something of a buzzword now, but I took the opportunity to learn about developmental principles in relation to communication”.

“The link between language and literacy and the PHASE project is a slightly tenuous one, but it does highlight issues of health and hygiene through language with a view to developing communicative competence and communication skills through a variety of participatory learning skills. Ultimately, it is about asking the question: How do I as a teacher teach literature skills better? How do I develop grammar skills better? How do I use group work to optimise language acquisition skills?”

“While the focus of the programme is primarily to develop English language skills, we are reluctant to force this component into the English language curriculum because we do not want the language issues to impede the social development goals of the programme. But we find that it is predominantly English language teachers who attend our workshops. So if I had to simplify the programme to its essence, it is about communication across a broad range of contexts in an active and contextually appropriate way.”

“Menstruation is another problem we address. We find that in many instances, when girls experience their menstrual cycles, they simply do not attend school because schools are not designed to accommodate them. I had never really thought about this before and it occurred to me that engineers who designed toilets hadn’t thought about it either. Poverty exacerbates the problem. In many instances, girls have no money for sanitary pads and used unhygienic rags that are embarrassing to conceal. They use all sorts of substitutes, which invite infection. It is also interesting to observe how health workers operate. They come into school with great fanfare and hold these great meetings at the assembly. They instruct learners in a non-participatory way so that learners either have little idea of what is going on, or are terribly embarrassed by the insensitive manner in which the issues are tackled. You have these teenagers experiencing all sorts of problems - with their growth and sexuality, - and are subjected to a lecture at an assembly. When you deal with these complex and complicated issues, you are sensitised to the problems beyond the school, in the communities, such as the problem of access to water and cultural issues around toilets. For example, a woman is not permitted to use the same toilets as her father-in-law. So, if a woman lives in the same household as her father-in-law, it is a taboo for her to use the toilet. It is this kind of cultural belief in rural areas, which many people hold tenaciously on to, that poses an obstacle in changing attitudes of children.”

*The telephone rings with a jarring note. Tracy apologises, and before she takes the call, I bid farewell. Mervin is in the reception area discussing the minutes of the trustees' meeting with Zain. He offers to walk me to my car, parked at the harbour where I often sit in the "Fish Café" after an interview with Mervin or Tracy, sipping a tot of Jack Daniels as I reflect and contemplate the interview. I recount my discussion with Tracy and the daunting problem of cultural attitudes that hinder development. We are soon discussing the 'Whorfian hypothesis' in which Sapir & Whorf suggest that our engagement with the world is mediated through language. Language acts a cognitive filter admitting or blocking out what is perceived to be socially and culturally acceptable. Mervin considered this as one of the greatest hurdles in changing behaviours towards health, sanitation and HIV AIDS. As we walked, Mervin reflected on the problems in Kwa-Zulu Natal with its preponderance of Cholera and diarrhoea and other development-related social problems.*

"It is amazing how some highly sophisticated leaders have such ill-considered attitudes towards development. I once presented a proposal to a senior official representing one of our donors, for funding to top up the existing budget for the PHASE project. The official made some rather outrageous comments about growing up without toilets and sanitation and that he was no lesser for that experience. Of course, he could not see that the context in which he grew up was quite different from the present conditions and that more than 60 % of the KZN rural population are infected with bilharzia. This might not be a fatal disease, but it slows you down, slows production, and makes you constantly sleepy. Its potential threat has recently been overshadowed by the high incidence of AIDS and cholera, but we should not underestimate the impact it has on the mental health of people. How often do we see the symptoms of bilharzia being associated with laziness and laxity and yet this is a health related disorder which can be addressed by educating people about sanitation."

*Mervin echoed Tracy's concern about the social attitudes to sanitation in rural areas where this is not on the list of community's priorities. My visit to a school in Northern KZN recently confirms this. I failed to comprehend why, in a perfectly modern, well appointed school; the toilets were a health hazard. Mervin quipped the other day that it appears to be mandatory that the toilets have to be filthy places, that there seems to be a notion that the place in which you defecate has to be dirty and what is worse is that people just won't talk about it.*

"I come from the country, where I experienced this cultural phenomenon first hand." Mervin reflects. "When a man needed to visit the toilet, he would not announce it, but would drift away quietly from the group and go into the bush. I also experienced this in Zambia. Although toilets would be provided, children would insist on messing the floor and refuse to clean it, because it was associated with dirt. So what we have is a deeply entrenched social taboo; which impacts on physical and mental health. In this context, it makes little sense to talk about the sophistications of language use. Recently, I visited a classroom in Kwa-Makuta where the teacher was doing a lesson on the function of the kidneys. Through out the lesson the teacher used the word 'excretion'. She used quite a torturous English explanation, which I'm certain the learners did not comprehend. But throughout the lesson, she avoided the Zulu equivalent of 'excrete'".

“Interestingly, English has a range of alternatives for the word ‘defecate’, depending on the social context for its usage, but in Zulu there is only one word, and its use is taboo. Having to avoid using this word results in a convoluted explanation through the medium of English, which confounds the meaning, rather than clarifies the hazards associated with the need for hygienic practices. This kind of reticence is at the heart of the problem, and it is like the proverbial “elephant in the living room,” everyone knows that it is there but no one wants to talk about it. This kind of linguistic “deficit” poses a tremendous challenge for development work. English is privileged in the sense that it has a range of alternative words in the lexicon, because of its Latinate and Anglo-Saxon influences. The importation and overlaying of words allows for the use of multiple words to deal with different contexts. One of the difficulties is that Zulu does not have a range of words or expressions to allow for certain nuanced meanings. If for example you want, in the formal sense, to speak about defecation and urination, you are constrained by the fact that these words have been rendered taboo. If you wanted to say, for example, “don’t urinate in the river”, you would have to use the equivalent ‘*pama*’ for urinate. Some teachers would find it unacceptable to use this word because of its taboo status. If language has some impact on thought, it can also constrain thought, and put boundaries around thought. If you have a fairly limited language, it can constrain thought. Leading to some kind of cognitive deficit.”

“Another serious problem we’ve found is male teachers’ attitudes to sexuality, particularly their attitudes to menstruation, which is seen as something unpleasant. This is compounded by the fact that in rural schools girls don’t have sanitary pads and if they do, they have no where to dispose of them, so they just stay away from school to avoid the mockery and scorn from teachers and boys. When you go to a conventional funder, you are likely to hear something like this: ‘Oh you’re talking about the tampons project?’ followed by laughter. I can imagine sitting around the table presenting a proposal on reproductive health and sanitation to this board:

‘What’s that project?’

‘It’s on tampons.’

‘Oh my God, put it aside!’”

*In his experience with AIDS awareness Mervin suggests that the same kind of mindset appears to confound the whole issue. In some communities, if the male suggests using a condom, the woman construes it as an implication that she has aids. Conversely, the woman would be afraid to tell the man to use a condom, because the implication is that man has aids. So, to avoid a potentially confrontational situation, they “commit suicide” by avoiding all talk about condoms. Quite often, Zulu men resent the women being demonstrably sexually aroused. A sexually aroused woman is construed as a promiscuous one. To avoid offending the man, the woman ensures that she is “dry”, increasing the potential for injury and infection of the aids virus. Clearly therefore, what we have is a cultural disability rooted in social practices which need to be challenged if we want to develop literacies. There is an increasing realisation in the development field that it is not sufficient to teach children to express themselves and communicate in English, when there are other physiological variables impacting on their ability to communicate effectively. As a consequence ELET has chosen to mediate these realities through the medium of English. Using a multi-faceted approach, they engage in interesting activities such as theatre, poetry, and mime to raise awareness around health and sanitation issues. The difficulty, in my mind is that it is not yet sufficiently pedagogic to market it as an effective language teaching intervention. The reason is perhaps that*

*they have not spent enough time developing its potential, and also because they do not have sufficient capacity to develop it further. For this reason, Tracy is perhaps correct in suggesting that they need an advisory board with members representing the health sector on it, to shape and develop the programme further.*

*At some stage I should like to argue with Tracy that the link between PHASE and literacy is not tenuous at all, and that PHASE is in fact a very sophisticated curriculum design for literacy. Should I push her a little to expand this tenuous link by presenting a thesis that PHASE is about literacy and that issues of health and sanitation is the vehicle for achieving the broader goal of literacy? Arguably, literacy translates into the difference between knowledge and ignorance. Knowledge about health and sanitation issues are deeply grounded in cultural constructs. What I think Tracy is doing in PHASE is expanding the knowledge base, which is confounded by cultural conceptions. Paulo Frerie has developed a model in Brazil as a consequence of precisely the same conditions that prevail in this country, particularly of how rural women, disempowered by a patriarchal system, can be re-empowered by challenging cultural conceptions of knowledge, of identity and of self. My sense is that PHASE has the potential to achieve this goal. For some reason, this construct has not been sufficiently debated in this country. What we need to do, perhaps as a product of this research, is to provide a theoretical justification for the programme rather than a politically correct justification for it.*

*The afternoon traffic crawls along the esplanade. Tired faces inhabit impatient motorcars as we negotiate the bustling Fenton lane. At the corner of Fenton Lane, is the familiar sight of women of all colours, shapes and sizes, poured into mini-skirts, seated on the sidewalk, plying their favourite line as we pass: "Can I give you a good time?" Somewhat embarrassed, and pretending not to hear, we continue walking. Our earlier discussion about sanitation and the problem of HIV AIDS is given another dimension. It is time to part our ways, as Mervin shakes my hand, with its characteristic firmness. The sound of the devouring jackhammer penetrating steel and concrete mutes the sound of traffic. The sight of construction work has always fascinated me. It's a strange self-indulgent kind of reassurance about humankind's progress. But this fleeting moment of joy is tintured by the chilling reminder of how few of humankind actually share in the fruits of development.*



## 8

*Crystal Springs*

*The fleecy clouds of mist lift gently from the weathered rocks and the languid river several thousand metres below. The air is filled with silence, interrupted momentarily by the twitter of a sparrow hastening home with nourishment for its fledglings. This is a piece of paradise. Nestling in the cascading mountains of the Eastern Transvaal, the resort resembles a picture in an exclusive travel magazine. Being a full time doctoral student is an agonising experience. But at times like these, it brings infinite joy as I seize the advantage of being on sabbatical, thanks to the generous grant from the Spencer foundation. The other family members have gone on an early morning hike in the mountains, allowing me to savour my moments of solitude. The crisp country air invigorates me as I put on my headphones to listen to Tracy's reflections of the PHASE project to gain insight into the pedagogy of literacy development for a paper I am presenting at a conference in Sun City the next week. I pick up the recording at the point where Tracy acknowledges the success of the PHASE project, but is less upbeat about its long-term prospects.*

"There is evidence that the programme is working. I'm not sure how sustainable this is because of the limited life cycle of the programme. But within the short space of one year, it is remarkable how things change. It does take longer to impact on certain behaviours, some of which are deeply ingrained and difficult to modify. The success of programmes is also heavily dependent on the willingness of the principal or the teacher to embrace the idea and enact it. We have seen in some schools where we have willing partnerships, children have developed vegetable gardens, designed posters, staged plays, raised funds for basins and soap. How sustainable this is, is difficult to tell. We did research the issue of sustainability by holding a competition for schools. We conducted unannounced spot checks on schools, and despite the fact that it was year-end and there was the usual chaos associated with the dawn of the festive season, there was still evidence of changes. The taps were no longer dripping as they did in the past. There were cups for drinking water. Posters were still on the wall. The pit toilets are a lot more difficult to keep clean, but our spot checks revealed that many toilets were clean, reinforced by posters up on walls. So there was evidence of physical change. This



change was not just imposed on learners by teachers, it was clear that learners had embraced these changes.”

*Tracy's enthusiasm for the PHASE project is tempered by her sense that the programme exists on the margins of ELET. Although the PHASE project brings in almost one third of ELET's total income, Tracy believes that if she had to leave ELET, there isn't the will amongst staff to continue with the project, as they would with the mainstream language oriented projects. She believes this is especially true of Mervin who invests a lot of energy into developing relationships with funders on language projects. She would like the PHASE project not to be seen as "other".*

“I am seen as the PHASE person, because I do not have the linguistic background and an insufficient handle on the issues, which might perhaps be correct. My feeling is that I have to fight to justify, not only my position, but also that of PHASE, so I'm glad for the USAID project, even though it is driving me mad, because it is big. But I'd like it to go beyond the bottom line of how much is it worth, and for Mervin to say that he really believes in these projects and that he is going to become more familiar with them. I'd like to be listened to more often. I do need leadership and direction and for this reason I have been motivating for an additional trustee or for an advisory board of people who can support what I am doing. I suppose I would appreciate someone signalling me to a journal article or a conference to keep me informed, because as much as I have a passion for what I do, it is not really my field, and I've had to learn what I know, as I've come along.”

*Tracy acknowledges Mervin's help in setting up meetings with funders and others, but regrets his reluctance to get directly involved. Her greatest fear is that if she had to leave ELET, the course would eventually die.*

“I suppose Mervin chooses to leave me alone because he feels more secure with the language courses, something he is more familiar with. So, while I do think that the PHASE programme is crucial in achieving the goals of rural development, it needs to move from the margins of ELET's activities to the centre. The difficulty for me is that as long as the programme is located in ELET, it will continue to remain on the margins. Perhaps if I launched my own unit within ELET, with some autonomy, and its own identity, things could be different. Another thing that needs to happen for strategic reasons is that the organisation needs to change its name. The “English” in ELET needs to change if we are to have a change in its identity.”

“In the meanwhile, we have to deal with the realities here, as they play themselves out in different communities, determined largely by the availability of funding and the specific will of the funder. It is usually the funder who identifies the area of need. In the case of the USAID funded project, it was the Department of Education that decided where in Kwa-Zulu-Natal we would work; we didn't have a say in it. What we then do is establish networks with partner organisations and government departments after which we run training workshops for them. The actual contact time with teachers is minimal. Much time goes into planning and initiating the programme. We have learnt from previous PHASE projects that we cannot go in as ELET alone. That approach does not guarantee sustainability. The participatory approach ensures that all constituencies take ownership and support the programme. We then develop the materials, with assistance from teachers, health professionals and other interested individuals and organisations. In the

first PHASE project, we piloted the materials, made a series of changes, and then ran a training programme with teachers over fifteen to eighteen hours. We try to get Education Department officials to attend workshops, but they usually never do. We cover the principles of OBE and how PHASE links with it. We also cover various action projects, getting teachers involved in the activities so that they know what it feels like. Trainers then go through the materials with teachers, giving them hints and insights on how to use them effectively. We provide the materials to the schools and give them time to implement them. The schools are grouped according to their geographic proximity, giving teachers an opportunity to work together and to motivate each other. The trainer would then go to groups of schools and observe the progress.”

“The idea of grouping schools really does work. You observe the one school which is characterised by laxity, apathy and a perpetually lazy look, while the school down the road is highly motivated and productive, with lots of exciting ideas and plans. Gradually there is a spinoff. The less productive school tries to mimic the productive one. We then have an independent evaluation of the project. A researcher would go in and do a baseline study, and then a post-project survey.”

*As I listen to the recording of my interview with Tracy, I experience an inexplicable sense of weightiness, a sudden realisation of my privileged position: a student holidaying in an international resort; the insular environment in which I work as an educator, safe from the realities of social conditions which I am not required to deal with; freed from the enormous challenges development workers face in a country where social and cultural taboos often militate against development initiatives; the perpetual struggle against the excessive bureaucratic demands of funders which often hampers progress rather than enable it. One of the dilemmas in development work is trying to balance our desire for genuine rigour with the funders' demand for numbers, the need to balance real growth, which is less visible and less obvious, with the funders' demand for quantifiable data. One will find development workers in general complaining profusely about the funders' obsessive demand for checklists rather than evaluating real progress. This often results in the dilution of the programme goals and the consequent loss of self-fulfilment for development professionals.*

“There are times when I feel I’m not doing enough as manager. I’m not referring to management of the bureaucratic aspects of the programme – there’s far too much of that in my opinion. I want to be able to refine the programme and add value to it. I want to take it beyond its weaknesses, particularly weaknesses in its implementation. I think I’d like to be able to have more of a presence, to be able to have more contact with trainers in districts. It is often frustrating when one has to deal with having to compromise your dreams of what you know you can achieve, to satisfy the unreasonable demands of the funder, who often has little knowledge of pragmatic realities one has to deal with. Funders like to speak about partnerships. They would like to think of their grantees as their partners. But this is often PC speak and their actual approach is quite paternal. The process of reporting is extremely rigid and highly bureaucratic. You cannot change a single item in the grant agreement without going through the most laborious process. To me this is not being developmentally minded. When you draw up a budget, the budget is, at best, an educated guess about anticipated expenditure. That’s all it can ever be. Invariably, some things will cost more, some will cost less. With USAID, any variation within the budget results in one having to go through the most unimaginable difficulties.

This is quite different from the approach of the European Union, which is far more flexible.”

“Over the past month, I spent so much time on what I regard as complete waste of time and energy simply to satisfy the extremely obsessive demands of USAID. All I asked for in a memo was to utilise unspent money to reinforce a project. This was additional money that became available as a result of the favourable Rand/Dollar exchange rate. I did not ask for more money or to change the original grant agreement. We had a whole day meeting over the issue and it took three drafts and more than a month for the approval to be signed. We also have to deal with funders’ representatives who are patronising and insulting and we are forced to endure it. I suppose funders are under pressure to ensure that funds are not misappropriated but officials often create the impression that they are really powerful, and behave as though they are parting with their personal fortunes. Relating to them is a very stressful experience, and I sometimes feel my throat closing up with tension when I have to talk to them. I don’t mind the rigorous demands from funders, but the USAID management style is very heavy handed, to the point of becoming demoralising to grantees.”

“Another demotivating factor is the limited one-year life cycle of the project. How much progress that is sustainable can you achieve in just one year? Typically, we would go into schools, support them for the duration of the year, and then disappear. We all feel uncomfortable with that arrangement, but that is what the funder wants. The contract lasts for a year and there is no further funding to sustain the project, although funders expected miraculous results after a year. The problem with that kind of expectation of delivery is that you only focus on superficial indicators that are easily discernible, whereas the real substantive indicators are much more subtle and require many more years to reveal themselves as change. Nevertheless, PHASE is a fairly rewarding programme and I still believe in its value.”

*I'm trying to understand the ethic of the funder. The relationship between funder and beneficiary appears to be based on the premise of exclusivity "we are the funder, you are the recipient: let's preserve the relationship". Steven Burkeman (2001), argues that money, a mere medium of exchange, takes on a significance that far exceeds its status as a symbol. When money is translated into something real, it does not carry the same baggage. Its potential is worth more than anything for which it might actually be used. The power to decide how it is to be spent has become the really valuable thing.*

“We had a review workshop at the Riverside Hotel on Friday. I conducted a session on action project reporting. I found that in all of the reports I received, trainers were confusing action projects with activities. I was receiving a barrage of so called action projects that were not action projects at all. There was the ‘hand washing action project’; the ‘gardening action project’; the ‘litter project’ and so on. I suspect that in many of these schools, the teacher or principal would allocate a particular activity to a specific grade, and use this as a punitive measure against offenders. So, because I am not a trainer, I found the workshop useful in addressing some of the issues that are of concern to me, particularly the fact that these types of projects are often not participatory or developmental: children do not learn anything new. Teachers seem to encourage children how to clean toilets. I have a serious problem with getting children to be good toilet cleaners: this is not what the project is striving for. This was what the Bantu education

system was about. We are not in the business of spawning a neo-apartheid by developing qualified toilet cleaners. It really fills me with horror that we are perpetuating this idea that children, especially girls, are being trained to be cleaners of other people's toilets. The activity was also perpetuating the idea that girls had the role of being toilet cleaners. The workshop showed that toilet cleaning in itself wasn't such a great idea. The real issue is to move on from toilet cleaning and to ensure that there was a transfer of learning to other aspects of health and sanitation in a sustainable way."

"One of the things we achieved at the workshop was develop collaboratively with the trainers an evaluation checklist of the main criteria for more effective reporting on action projects: that learners should be involved in most or all of the decisions; that learners should be able to learn something new and useful in the course of the project; and that learners should be able to use this information to take action and effect real change. These reports are used as additional data to the usual evaluators tools such as questionnaires for principals, teachers, and learners, and wherever possible, lesson observations. Evaluators also observe whether anything at the school has changed in a visible way. In some cases, trainers have reported that boys are now cleaning their own toilets and I think this change may be attributed to younger trainers who are also more conscious of gender issues. It's a little harder to change the older trainers even though they know that we're not supposed to encourage girls to be the only toilet cleaners."

"Are these evaluation reports an honest authentic useful tool? This is something I really battle with. Perhaps I don't have the mind that takes statistics very seriously... we all know how easily they can be manipulated. I'll give you an example: You ask the question: "Who should be responsible for cleaning the toilets?" You analyse the responses and express it as a statistic, which reveals that 85% of the respondents think that girls should clean the toilet. That is a clear and unambiguous question and the analysis thereof is unproblematic. But there are other questions that to me are problematic. For example, the whole issue about the implementation of OBE and OBE materials in the classroom. Let us consider this question: "Do teachers feel confident to implement OBE?" What I would like to know is how do you express someone's level of confidence in the form of statistics? You could say 47% feel confident to teach, but does this say anything meaningful about the programme. It says even less about how the participants experienced the programme and whether it has had any sustainable impact on the practices of teachers. We generate vast amounts of data for the funder, which I find rather shallow. It's a game I don't enjoy playing. The funder does verify some of the data by classroom visits in which they observe classroom interaction; group work and questioning techniques. This, I believe is much more meaningful, but I do not think we have enough of this mode of evaluation."

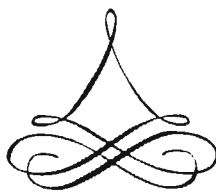
"If I were to do evaluations differently, I would use a much more honest approach. We generate far too much statistical data, which does not reveal authentic information. I think you can get much-more-interesting-information from a focus group discussion with learners or teachers. You won't get a neat statistic that fits nicely into your project management plan for USAID, but at least it is a valid reflection of reality. The smaller projects covered by Mvula Trust who, I think, is more open to that kind of evaluation, use it as a baseline for impact assessment. In this way, the data you generate has much more depth and the actual transcripts of discussions are far more illuminating. Instead of this obsession with numbers, we focus on more crucial issues of the action project such as: Who decided on the topic for the action projects? How did the learners go about

doing the action projects? What did they learn from their action projects and from the project as a whole? We also throw in some controversial issues to get the kids talking about broader issues. I think this is a much more meaningful and human approach. None of us are just numbers on a spreadsheet.”

“One of the ways of measuring the success of action projects is by counting the number of action projects we implement. Clearly, this is a problem. The emphasis falls on having action projects for the purpose of accumulating them, not for the inherent value of the process and their outcomes. We have to ask more relevant questions, such as: Have the children engaged with this activity meaningfully? Has the teacher used it in the class as a theme, or as a programme? Have teachers developed through the projects? Have learners developed through their engagement? Is classroom practice improving? Those kinds of issues are the real reasons we are doing these projects. We're not doing this so that we can say, ‘Ah, we had 370 action projects this year!’ But the funder puts that kind of pressure on us. And sometimes you have to take a step back and say, ‘No I don't actually care, I want real action projects, not numbers. I would rather have 50 real action projects than 300 clean-ups.’ The clean-ups are good. They are important, in that it helps children take responsibility and feel pride in their environment, but they're not action projects. It would be so easy for me to take all of these little clean-up activities and call them action projects, but firmly believe that you just have to keep a clear and sincere perspective of what your mission is in development work. Then there's the issue of reporting. You have to fill in these tables on development indicators, about the number of meetings you held and how many minutes you wrote, how many men came to the workshop, how many women came to the workshop, and none of these “indicators” evaluates the quality of the project, and in a sense does the project an injustice because the real impact of what we do is never fully appreciated. Having said that, I must emphasise that I fully endorse the need for rigorous, creative modes of evaluation for accountability, I'm just opposed to the highly technicist quantitative approaches that funders seem to favour over more meaningful qualitative approaches.”

*The sound of tired but exited voices fills the room. I switch off the audio recorder, remove my headphones and walk into the kitchen to prepare breakfast for the hungry hikers.*





## 9

## *Lefty Plans, Noble Expectations, Cruel Realities*

*I snail through the morning traffic towards the imposing edifice in Main Street. I follow the familiar routine, signing in the visitors' book, returning to my favourite leather couch. Soon a familiar smile greets me. This time we walk up to Teboho's office rather than the coffee shop. I am relieved at the change of scenery and the freedom from distraction. Unlike the extravagance that adorns the rest of the AV building, the décor in Teboho's office is modest, perhaps an indicator of her own modesty, a quality one with deep roots in the development field has come to acquire. Teboho is warm, and easy to talk to, with a frankness, which says that there very are few things she will not talk openly about. Our interview today is more of a casual chat rather than a data collection exercise as I came to realise when I noticed that I had forgotten to switch on the recorder.*

*"Tell me Teboho, how would you assess your engagement with ELET over the years? What are your perceptions of the institution's contribution to development within the broader context of educational development in South Africa?" Is the question somewhat pedantic? I wonder, but Teboho's willingness to answer vindicates it.*

"ELET's contribution to the field of development has been crucial, not from the perspective of promoting a particular language, but as a vehicle for facilitating the effective use of language as a tool for teaching and learning. For this reason I've been supportive of ELET's diversification into programmes which use language as a vehicle to address other social issues such as health and sanitation and environmental issues. It is a truism that many of the country's learning difficulties have their roots in the language problem. We know, from research, that people's inability to articulate their understanding of concepts is not an indicator of their inferior cognitive ability, but is a linguistic problem, which can be remedied. Whether we accept it or not, English will be with us for a long time to come and we cannot deny the fact that the English is a powerful international language. From an ideological perspective, it is regrettable that English has acquired its dominant status in relation to other African languages, but the reality is that unless we master the language of the marketplace, we will be marginalized. Subconsciously, most South Africans have already made a choice to pursue English as the lingua Franca, and it is in no one's interest to resist it."

“There is an attempt by the state to adopt a more inclusive approach to languages in this country. The minister of education has just committed to translating some of the Matriculation papers into the main African languages. Someday, with hope, we will achieve language equity. Until we get there, we must accept that the status quo will prevail, and that we need to train teachers to mediate the curriculum effectively through the medium of English. As an NGO, we cannot continue, in the next decade, to call ourselves an English Language Institute. For me there have been two main challenges. There has been the challenge of defining exactly where we locate ELET as a development agency as we move into the future. Without losing sight of our mission of language development, we need to continuously reinterpret and be responsive to changing realities. While we cannot be everything to everyone, we cannot fail to respond to the challenges of a society in transition. The other challenge relates to the sustainability of an organisation by moving away from donor dependence to earned income, and having sufficient reserves to enable the organisation to plan for up to three years in advance without having to be apprehensive about whether you are going to be commissioned to generate funds to pay the bills. When we reach that stage, we can dream about possibilities without the fear of failure, experiment with new ideas, to attract and retain human resources, and be selective about the kind of contracts we accept. As long as we are dependent on handouts, we run the risk of not being able to attract competent staff, who have their own aspirations and may be attracted by other opportunities. As long as we are preoccupied with problems of finance and funding, we run the risk of dampening the enthusiasm of staff. We want to keep people like Cecil, Tracy and Cheron excited about the work they do, without them having to worry about whether they are going to get paid at the end of the month.”

*If NGO performance is to be evaluated on the basis of public expectations of their delivery, many NGOs may be judged as failures because they have failed to satisfy these expectations. Conversely, successful NGOs in recent times are those that have made the shift from an essentially welfarist orientation to a more developmental one. This kind of strategic orientation has influenced an NGO's ability to develop sustainable systems, often in a hostile policy environment and a volatile economic climate. There is a perception in the public domain that ELET is a successful NGO. What are the indicators of "success"? What has influenced ELET's "successful" history, and how has it been able to survive in a volatile NGO climate.*

“The strategic choices that ELET has made are not significantly different from other “successful” NGO’s. They have all had to make conscious and decisive choices to adapt to a changing economic environment. To rate ELET’s success depends on how one defines success. I suppose I could, based on my own conceptions of success, generate at least ten descriptors of success. Let’s focus on three of them. If we say that ELET’s success is determined by its delivery in terms of the effectiveness of its programmes, then we need to be able to say, for example, that in the year-2001 we have conducted 25 workshops and that there is a tangible improvement in the quality of the teachers we train. Although I am chair of ELET, I’m not yet in a position to sing praises about the quality of its programme offerings because we have no empirical evidence of this yet. As ELET moves into a new phase of self-reliance based on project-funded income, it will be necessary for ELET to clearly define its outcomes, which can be measured. We need to be in a position to be able to say that what teachers have achieved in terms of their development has been achieved as a direct consequence of ELET’s intervention. I’m yet



to see us going back into the classrooms we claim to influence, and observe the impact of our intervention. To claim success, we need to be able to pronounce that we have successfully run 100 workshops, and that the success of the workshops on teacher development can be observable by specified indicators of competence. If we are to sustain success, we will have to accept that impact analysis is going to be a crucial component of an NGO's ability to survive in a climate of shrinking donor funding. Our ability as an NGO to attract future contracts will depend on our ability to demonstrate empirically, the impact of our intervention programmes."

"As an NGO, we also need to define success in financial terms. It is true that ELET has successfully weathered a very stormy NGO climate. It is true that the staff of ELET have been on a sharp learning curve, learning to speak quite a different language from the one they spoke pre-1994. There were turbulent times, which have claimed the lives of other NGOs, but ELET has bounced back and responded to the challenge. Mervin could easily have gone into retirement when things got really tough, leaving the organisation in the hands of others. There were times up till recently when we would end a financial year not knowing whether ELET would open its doors the following year. Despite this uncertainty, ELET staff has returned to work and churned out creative and innovative ideas, which others have bought into. That to me is an indicator of success that needs to be applauded. In addition, there has been some clear thinking about human resource issues. There is an acknowledgement that we cannot sustain an organisation that has an endless number of staff, and that there needs to be some degree of rationalisation with a corresponding outsourcing of work to consultants. They have made some serious and painful choices and have successfully been able to trim a significant drain on its limited resources. Obviously when you make such choices, you lose something in the process. We've had to sacrifice some degree of loyalty: When you use consultants rather than permanent staff, you have to accept that you cannot expect the same degree of loyalty from them."

*"Your position as chair of the ELET board as well as development consultant to AV must be quite a challenging one. Do you find yourself being torn between your allegiance to ELET as a board member and your allegiance to AV as development consultant?"*

"It is difficult to be constantly juggling the two hats. It's a perpetual struggle that requires constant vigilance and acute consciousness to ensure that one or the other does not blind you. Sometimes it's a bit like a scorpion biting its own tail, especially when you are critical of an organisation of which you are senior board member. Fortunately, with ELET, there have not been any serious problems of delivery. The problem has been one of strategy. The other advantage is that serving the two roles gives you an intimate understanding of both."

*"As chair of ELET and as consultant to AV, you are in a fairly powerful position. What does it mean to be a Black woman as chair of a respected NGO? What advantages have the fact that you are a woman had on your role as chair?"*

"At AngloVaal, I've played a very modest role. I've managed to earn the respect of people in the company, and for this reason, I am quite influential in the area of grant-making. In the six or seven years that I have been both manager and consultant at AV, I don't remember having a single recommendation that I made being turned down. I think we need to distinguish between being powerful and being influential. I'd like to think

that I am influential but not powerful. I take my task seriously, and I am respected for it. I'm not in the habit of making recommendations to AV, of which I do not have full conviction, or make recommendations which I wasn't completely certain would succeed. If I did that, I would in effect be diluting my credibility. Being a Black woman as a development consultant hasn't really been a huge struggle. This is perhaps because of the way I chose to position myself in the corporate sector. I do not see myself as a corporate animal. Maybe that will change someday, I don't know. But I see myself as a facilitator of corporate and community relations. However, you would find frequently that you are the only woman and the only dark face talking to a predominantly White group who don't have an understanding or an interest in what you are doing. The challenge then is not just to convince them of the value of your submissions; you first have to convince them of your own credibility."

"The situation is similar with NGOs. The board members are predominantly male, but being a black woman serving on these boards has never really been a serious issue for me. Perhaps I've just been blind to it, or perhaps that real struggle has been trying to reconcile the different ideologies of the two worlds. When my ideas are not accepted, I do not automatically assume that it is because I am a Black woman, I refuse to define my identity in this narrow way. I am conscious of the pervasiveness of gender and race, but they do not get foregrounded in my engagement with people. Some may argue that as one of the few Black women in this predominantly male/White building, I have a responsibility to fight and champion the cause of women. I don't see it that way. The battles I enter into are related to my development work. Maybe I am selfishly pushing the community/corporate linkages agenda, and ignoring the role that I could be playing... fighting broader political issues in the organisation. But I'm scared of that. As a political activist since my youth, I am aware that when you become such a political animal, ten years down the line, you are unable to account for one productive goal that you have accomplished. I've become very goal-orientated in recent years, and I have made a conscious decision to work in the field of development because I believe that it is here that political battles are fought. If we can influence the quality of education available to our children, then presumably we influence the quality of their lives. I have chosen to draw this line, but I'm fully conscious that this is not necessarily the proper line to draw."

*One of the effects of globalisation on organisational cultures is the institutionalisation of Strategic planning meetings as a "mandatory" requirement for "effective" management. For ELET, strategic planning meetings in the past were usually proactive. They represented an attempt to charter a common vision for members as well as an attempt to be collectively responsive to developmental challenges as they unfolded. The strategic planning of 2001 was arguably one of the turning points in ELET's history, in that for the first time, the meeting was reactive rather than proactive. It attempted to charter a new strategic vision to navigate ELET through a current of new developmental challenges. While the funding crisis, which appears to have become a hallmark of NGOs, continues to be an insurmountable challenge, the new politics of higher education and the marginalisation of NGOs from the professional development arena threatens the survival of institutions such as ELET. For some members the workshop was a cathartic experience, for others it was destabilising. But what could no longer be denied, is that the ELET of yesteryear was gone forever and that all members would have to put on hats of painful realism. In a sense, Teboho has to change hats whenever she sits as Chair of*

*the ELET board. What were her expectations of the strategic planning meeting? Did the meeting satisfy her expectations?*

“To be honest, the only expectation I had was that people would get an opportunity to express openly, their feelings, frustrations and hopes regarding their lives at ELET. I had hoped that the process of sharing these feelings and attitudes in an open forum would enable people to reach a common understanding of where ELET was going. While I did not expect any major decisions to be made, we did achieve an understanding of where individuals within ELET are. However, I do think that we lost a valuable opportunity of steering ELET in a direction I believe it should be taking. For example, it is clear that the “courses” are in trouble financially. Instead of focussing our energies on exploring solutions, many of us used it as an opportunity to complain. It also gave me an opportunity to share directly, with staff, my thinking around the whole issue of how we manage resources, and the degree of risk we can take in relation to the resources available. There is a danger, of the board’s position on issues being underrepresented or misrepresented since all staff are unable to attend board meetings. Therefore tackling these issues as a staff was a useful exercise that should be done annually.”

*Strategic planning meetings are often forums for the articulation of lofty plans, shaped by noble expectations, tempered by cruel realities. Ultimately, individual identities crafted out of dreams and aspirations give form to institutional identity, and the newly forged institutional identity in turn determines its ability to serve its mission. What is Teboho’s prognosis for ELET’s health as it enters a new phase of self-sufficiency and self-reliance?*

“Positive! ELET has great potential. ELET will be healthy if people within it accept the changed environment and continue to try to live within it rather than try to fight it. Based on its progress, which it has achieved so quickly, it is reasonable to expect that ELET will elevate in status. But, having said that, I am going to be like a nasty heart surgeon who warns that the patient has to abstain from smoking and drinking to survive, I would caution ELET about dreaming on about the good old days.”





## 10

### *An Existential Dilemma?*

*Tracy is uncharacteristically agitated today. Last night the ELET offices were invaded by robbers who made-off with all the organisation's computers and communication equipment. Noting her discomfort, I suggest that we take up the interview on another occasion but Tracy assures me that she did not mind continuing. I ask about whether at times like this, she regretted being part of the development world.*

"Have I made the correct career choice? I must admit that it is a difficult question. When I look back to the point at which I started as a graphic designer almost ten years ago, to where I am now, I realise that PHASE wasn't a conscious choice. It wasn't part of a ten-year plan. Neither will I be able to tell you where I want to be in the next five years. I think I'm good at what I do, but it's hard to say with certainty, because it is difficult to acknowledge one's strength; it is easier to acknowledge one's weaknesses. I do get very frustrated with certain aspects of my job. I am good at managing processes but have had to learn to manage people. I do also enjoy working with people although I am not always good at dealing with situations of conflict and having to discipline people. There are a few people on my team that bring me such joy, perhaps because they are so committed and bring new energy into the project. I don't see the project as the Tracy Brownlee show, and so I value the contribution that other people bring into the project.

I suppose there are a couple of things about this job that sustain me. Foremost would be the projects that I've spent hours writing proposals for. They are quite a challenge for me, those huge lollipops in the sky. The other thing that nurtures me would be the feeling of getting good reports from trainers, like the reports from Londiwe, which are critical, honest, and authentically generated out of school visits. I do not appreciate glossy reports that provide little scope for improvement.

I've lost faith in workshops. You do need to bring people together and provide some sort of unifying programme, but I have found that workshops in themselves simply do not yield the kind of results you would expect from it. The cascade model of training does not work either. We've found that in schools there would be a distinction made between different categories of teachers. You would then say, for instance: "Those are the OBE teachers. We are not the OBE teachers; those are the HIV life skills teachers". I'm afraid cascading just does not generate the intended results. There is some value in the clustering approach, which we initiated in Zululand, but those are plagued by their own problems such as poor communication between the Department of Education and apathy on the part of some teachers, resulting in these workshops being poorly attended.

Therefore, I prefer the individual school based intervention programmes, which involves adopting sites and instituting a carefully designed programme with proper developmental mechanisms and proper evaluation approaches. This, in our experience at ELET, achieves far more in terms of sustainable development. The approach is much more expensive and much more time consuming, but a lot more productive and successful. We cannot claim to be able to produce good teachers, what we can do is provide the conditions to enable teachers to direct their energies in productive and sustainable ways.

You encouraged me to contemplate on the link between PHASE and literacy, a link which I saw as tenuous but which you saw as intimate. I have thought about it, and got a clearer picture of it from you at the strategic planning meeting. It is a more academic conception of literacy, rather than a simplistic one that we are commonly accustomed to. It would be useful to explore the notion further, but as Cheron indicated at the Strategic Planning Meeting, it is not a commonly understood notion in the development arena so its use would be limited to perhaps a group of academics. If we were to expand on and build this conception of literacy, we would first need to translate it so that the constructs are accessible and easily understood by a non-academic audience. My understanding of the notion is limited by my own limited exposure to it in my tertiary education, which promoted a somewhat different conception of literacy. But I like the idea of knowledge for living and knowledge for a purpose, the kind of pedagogy promoted by Paulo Freire.

I think the last Strategic Planning Meeting was quite useful in other respects too. We agreed without much contestation on the name change. It was a compromise, and like most compromises, we don't expect everyone to get overwhelmingly excited, but at least everyone can live with it. I understand the staff's reluctance to abandon the name "ELET". I have been getting quite stressed out over this identity thing and I decided to let go. I am not here to further my own goals, to feed my ego or to make my mark in indelible ink. I want to be like the water flowing over the rock. I re-examined my self and my motives and tried to understand why I was getting so worked up about issues of name and identity. I was aware at the SPM that Mervin was using it as a forum to promote his own agendas and it was clear that he did not want a name change. The tone at management meetings and even in informal discussions was starting to become quite combative: that there was a winner and a loser. I realised that I was investing so much in the outcome of the process that there was a danger that if my proposition wasn't taken seriously, I was going to feel undervalued and undermined. It was then that I decided that it was time to disinvest. I needed to remind myself of my purpose at ELET. I am here to fulfil a purpose that is bigger than just my personality and me. I suppose we all become involved in our own progress and goals and focus on whether others know that you are doing a good job rather than just acknowledging that you are part of the process and that the work you do must benefit and contribute to change. So, disinvesting helped me let go of particular expectations. I believe that we should not focus on things that separate us, we should focus on our commonalities and what unites us. Within that broad united framework of unity, we can segregate into specialist areas.

I'm happy with the change of name to embrace our work with environment education. In the latest draft, we've expanded on the notion of environment. I'm busy working on the vision for the environment education project. It is inspired by the notion of love of the self as a prerequisite for love of the environment. Children are socialised into responding to their environment through their own experiences. For instance, if you place a child in an unhygienic, barren, environment with broken windows and no sanitation, the signal

you send out is that she is not valued. Therefore, we shouldn't expect the child to value the environment. There is an intimate link between self respect and respect for the environment and respect for others. Cecil is quite a passionate protagonist of the notion of the "loved school". We often, in development, lose track of the importance of beauty in our lives. It is unfortunate therefore that the arts are first to fall victim in a society in transition. The arts are seen as dispensable because they are not seen to have a tangible benefit. Cecil's project on tree planting is not just about planting trees. It's about beautifying the environment, and to me that is connected to developing the child's sense of worth. We received some beautiful poems from a competition we ran with one of our schools in Inanda. The one poem was called "my garden: myself". It was about this child looking after her garden as she would look after herself.

Do I still want to leave ELET? I enjoy working at ELET; I've been here for a long time. But there are parts of me that enjoy different kinds of interaction. I get on well with pretty much everyone at ELET. Naturally, there are people that I don't deal with much, and others with whom I don't get on as well as with others. So, I'm not unhappy here, but I'd like a new environment, with new people and new challenges. However, I do go through phases. If you'd spoken to me just before the SPM, I was definitely strategising on leaving ELET. But that was tempered by the fact that I am realistic about my need for material security, and wouldn't simply abandon my job. I must admit that while I relish the idea of autonomy, it is rather a scary thought because I like being part of an established structure. I'm not sure that I have the courage to branch out on my own. I would perhaps be tempted to go to another organisation, which would be more receptive and attuned to my ideas. However if I had to envision an autonomous entity within ELET, it would have to have a strong life skills focus, focusing on a range of developmental issues, which I imagine would change as pragmatic needs demand. By skills I mean having the knowledge and capacity to live a better quality life. I don't believe that these skills are acquired through just formal education. I'm not even confining it to the schooling system and limiting it to teachers. I think we need to look a little broader to community development structures to develop life skills.

I always go through phases with ELET of feeling frustrated and wanting to leave and I very seldom in the last few years have felt, "Ooo, I love being here and I don't want to leave." But at the moment, I honestly would recommend anyone working at ELET to try and find another job as fast as possible. We've been through this before and we are not unfamiliar with crises, but when Peter starts telling me that he was worrying about ELET all weekend, then I know things are really bad. It's like the coral in the sea; you use that as a barometer to feel what's actually happening with pollution levels in the sea. I think people are very demoralised, very, very demoralised, and it is very difficult for me as a manager, I'm in the middle, you know. I have to report back to my staff and tell them: 'there's no bonuses, I don't know when bonuses are coming, there may not be any, be glad you've got a salary at least.' The problem is there's something wrong with the planning because everyone was told in December we would get bonuses, and then suddenly it doesn't look like we will be getting them. You have to be looking at budgets and figures and projects all the time and say, 'Well, we probably won't be able to give bonuses this year', giving people adequate warning. But to actually tell them they're getting their bonus, it will be a few weeks late and then to start saying, 'Well maybe next month, maybe next month, maybe next month and if you resign, you won't get anything.' You can't do that to people.



You actually can't do that. Salary increases were delayed till March, but a memo went out that increases would be quite modest. I don't believe we'll get any kind of increase and yet people have now been promised something that will not materialise. I don't believe you can do that to people. We need to be able to look at projects that we are involved in, and the finances that are available and anticipate where what has to be paid and why money is being pumped into black holes. And if there's no money for bonuses, that's OK, but you need to tell people that beforehand, so they know. So, I think there are big issues at stake and I think there are a lot of people putting their heads in the sand at the moment. Then I go to management meetings and I sit there and there's a lot of evasion of hard questions and nobody wants to confront the awkward questions about cash flow and finances.

I know that I'm in a privileged position because the USAid money is there and they've got loads of it, so at least our jobs are guaranteed until the end of December. I think it's fine to take certain risks with projects, if you expect it will reap rewards from it in the future. But, after how many years of sustained losses will it take for us to realise that have we been running our teacher development courses unprofitably and that they are just draining our resources? For years, the teacher development courses have just been a black hole. My approach would be to give it a chance to get going and work on hope and optimism, as Mervin does. However, if after 3 or 4 years there is no tangible progress in terms of its self-sustainability, you have to actually say, 'No, this is not working'. Change or cut or do something, but you can't carry on pouring money into paying tutors, materials developers, support staff and in general paying fortunes to people who are doing work that does not generate income for the organisation. An added problem is that students aren't paying their fees. I don't know exactly what's going on with the universities' subsidies, but it's always less than it was believed because no one gets anything down in writing with a signature against it. Agreements are based on a good smile and a handshake. And then all sorts of expectations are built on the handshake and projections into the future on what we think the subsidy will be and nothing materialises. And then you say, 'Oh well, you know, that's a pity, we were expecting more but received less.' I don't believe you can work like that any more. Perhaps there was a time when NGOs did operate on that basis successfully. Times have changed and we can't afford to any longer.

I don't believe that one should never cross-subsidise departments. I think that it is sometimes necessary to subsidise those initiatives that are really vital to your mission as a social development organisation. It might mean that it is a service that relies entirely on cross-subsidisation from other departments. That's fine. But you have to plan for that deficit and you need to keep your costs down on that kind of service. You need to consider what is realistic, what we can really afford.

Fortunately, with USAid, the funding contract stipulates that we have to have a separate account and I really appreciate that. I think if it hadn't been for the PHASE project, we would have been in trouble a long time ago because of the extent of cross-subsidisation. The money that was supposedly put aside for our bonuses is now being used to pay other accounts like rent and insurance and the salaries of tutors and a range of other expenses. There is cross-subsidisation with the administration component as well as the team projects. The argument is always, 'well, we have to pay the salaries, or we have to pay the rent, or we have to pay... and there's money available, and we're not using it right now, so let's use it to pay our expenses'. On the surface, it makes a lot of sense, but

when we want to hold a workshop or print some materials, we discover that there's no money.

We must remember that we are operating in a very different context now. We have witnessed a dramatic shift in the funding scenario. Funders are no longer only funding NGOs; they're also funding consultancies, non-profit organisations, universities, research units and others. So, on the one level we have to compete with them. They go in, wearing their smart business suits and gold earrings and woo funders with their *PowerPoint* presentations and funders are very impressed by that. Funders are more interested in giving work to people whom they know are going to get the job done rather than people who have a history of development work. There is certainly a culture of entitlement amongst NGOs, and I think ELET to some degree is guilty of this. Funders no longer respond to the 'cap in hand' approach. No longer can we go to a funder and say 'We're an NGO, we have a social responsibility focus, and therefore you must just give us money because we deserve it... Look at the work we have done for the last 15 years, so please give us some money so we don't collapse'. Funders are not interested in giving money just because the NGO has a good track record. That's what used to happen. Now, NGOs have to respond to competition and results orientated development environment. Therefore, cultivating a positive image and marketing an organisation aggressively is vital. Funders are favourably disposed to an NGO which has a social bottom line, but which acts like a business.

The days of funders offering generous handouts have changed. Funders have become very disillusioned by the number of NGOs that misappropriated funds or just didn't deliver. So now, their focus is to seek the best person or organisation for the job. They don't particularly care whether you're an NGO or whether you're a private company. And I don't think their approach is necessarily a bad thing, because I think there was a lot of fuzziness around the handout mentality and entitlement, which I don't think does anybody any good in the long run. Let us accept the reality that the blanket funding NGOs once received is dead. But having said that, I don't think there has to be a contradiction between operating in a professional, competent and businesslike way with maintaining a humanitarian mission. This is not to say that business is always professional and competent, but I'm just linking the means to the end. The challenge for us involved in humanitarian work is to reach our social bottom line but not at the expense of our financial bottom line. We're not missionaries out there waiting for the funders' god to deliver. It is a fact that we have to compete in an environment that's getting far more difficult, and I don't think by responding to competition, your essence is corrupted by it. It's just a different way of looking at how you work and how you see yourself in your work. Although we face frustrating blockages as we do with the PHASE project and USAid who puts enormous pressure on the quantitative side of what we do, I acknowledge that it is a lot more difficult to measure educational and social development, because you're not building bridges or houses. Social development is much harder to achieve, it takes much longer; it has to be more repetitive. It has to have a lot more follow-ups and it has to be sustainable. I'm not sure whether there are ways of measuring success but it's something that makes us more rigorous, more accountable and it lifts the profile of social development."





## 11

*"It's Better to Light  
One Small Candle  
In One Dark Corner,  
Than To Curse the Darkness"*

*Despite the unpredictable, volatile world of the NGO, Mervin displays inexhaustible optimism even in desperate circumstances. However, his characteristic sanguinity is somewhat tainted by frustration at the bureaucratic culture that appears to be creeping into South African Society. Directors of NGOs are accustomed to conducting business on the basis of a firm handshake. That, apparently is no longer the way to conduct business.*

"I used to observe as director in the turbulent years, that university academics tended to take a rather doctrinaire position on issues of development, but all they were really doing was slapping on "band aid". When a patient is terminally ill, you need to administer surgery, not bandage the affected area. So I believe in the principle of helping a few people along while we find the appropriate surgical instrument. Likewise, we have this sea of darkness...we can't possibly light up the whole place, we don't have the power or capacity to do that. What we can do is light up a little corner, to provide a sense of direction for what is possible. This may sound like a middle class liberal stance, but what I've found is that people paralyse themselves with a kind of ideological rigidity. What happens as a consequence is that we engage in a series of talk shops where the act of talk is seen as work. The talking constitutes the democratic act, and is an end in itself. This is particularly true of the new bureaucrats who see talk as more important than anything else. The new preoccupation amongst South Africans is THE MEETING. Sometimes you need an important document signed, a document that is central to the progress of a series of other developments. 'No, you cannot have the document signed now, because the bureaucrat is in a meeting'... 'can't you just interrupt the meeting for just a minute to have the document signed?' .... 'no, you can't disturb him.....'. You find that a number of these bureaucrats come into a meeting late, and leave early, ostensibly to another meeting. So at the end of the day, you ask them what they did for the day, the answer

usually is: '...well, I attended three meetings today'. What was actually accomplished at the meetings is of no consequence.

The crisis we are now in is precisely a result of this kind of bureaucratic heavy-handedness. We have a one-year course for teachers of English as a Second Language, which is a very good course that we've been adapting for South Africa and asked Vista University to validate it, which they did. But the persons who agreed to accredit it, didn't go through the proper procedures of aligning it to an equivalent course offered by Vista. As a result, they officially conferred the diploma but subsequently found that it didn't meet certain South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) requirements. They just couldn't get equivalence in what they call the REQV, because apart from language, it didn't have any other core components, such as education and pedagogy. After students had completed the course, Vista demanded that we offer a second subject as well and refused to recognise the qualification without the second component.

To remedy the problem, we went through a lengthy correspondence process. As it turned out, it was a one-way correspondence. We were just writing letters to them, they weren't replying. They weren't answering our phone calls. The responsible officers who ought to have been solving the problem were always in 'meetings'. Then two officials came down to Durban ostensibly to solve the problem. They said that the way to resolve the REQV issue was to try and link it to one of Vista's courses and that we would hear from them. We never heard from them. We continued the battle with no resolution. About 2 months ago I was desperate because the students that had written the examinations were not given their certificates and I had a call from the Union stating that the teachers are applying for jobs and they needed their certificates, and that we had an obligation to issue them.

And really, this is no fault of ours. We had negotiated the necessary terms at Vista and Vista had approved of the qualification. We have a letter from the Vice-Rector confirming that they approved the course, but unfortunately, he is no longer there to honour the agreements. This affects 300 students who are anxious and this is not good for the image of ELET, which took us several years to cultivate. I then wrote to the registrar, and he said he that was going to come down to Durban to resolve the problem. He didn't turn up either. Eventually, I had to actually go to Vista and sit outside the Vice-Chancellor's office, literally. I went over to see the Registrar who never replied to my letters, or returned my calls. I sat outside his office and the secretary said, 'He's going to have a meeting with the Vice-Chancellor. Why don't you go and wait outside the Vice-Chancellor's office?' I sat there. I decided to wait there till I saw one of them. After an endless wait, the Vice-Chancellor eventually appeared over and we discussed the matter. He apologised for the delay and promised to address the matter.

In the meantime, we are in a different kind of crisis - a financial crisis. In the past, we've managed just to keep our heads above water... just about. But this year AngloVaal gave us less than half what they gave us last year, and they have decided that in the future, they would give us funding as and when we applied for it and there's no guarantee that they will actually give us the funding. Teboho no longer has much influence because she has to persuade most of the principals of the 3 companies who are quite hard-nosed business executives. They're a different breed from the old philanthropists that we were dealing with in the past. One of the directors has passed on, one of them is retired, and their sons and other people who have succeeded them don't have the same loyalty to

what they actually initiated. So, in addition to project funding, we try to look for funding elsewhere to support us.

However, now we face another extremely difficult challenge. We have difficulty in recruiting teachers because there's quite a huge competition out there and just about all universities are competing for the same group of students, which constitutes a really a small market. To compound the problem, some of the universities are fairly inexpensive because they have the advantage of massified programmes conducted on a large scale. Places like Rand Afrikaans University, University of Pretoria, Potchefstroom and Fort Hare are even offering bursaries to students, so we've lost a large number of prospective students because we cannot afford to compete on an equal footing with them. There are students who have a certain loyalty to ELET and want to carry on studying with us, but because now we don't get funding for our courses, we have to charge for it. We do get people who want to apply, but they don't have the registration fees and we can't continue offering the course without generating fees for it. There was a time when we used to get generous support from both the British Aid agency and the US Aid agency for those courses that we offered with Cambridge University. With that kind of funding, we were in a position to charge students a token fee, and cater for the needs of the indigent.

Having complained, I must say that I am not really unduly perturbed. My disposition is naturally really an optimistic one. '*Alles sal reg kom, menere.*' I think there's still a lot to feel optimistic about. We are looking for alternative funding for projects. We are always designing and introducing new programmes. It's just a matter of time before we find a big project. Because we're not a large NGO, it is perhaps easier to survive these impediments. Let me tell you about some of our more exciting projects in the pipeline. We are presently involved in piloting a "language for learning project". The course focuses on improving performance in other content-specific subjects by making teachers more language-sensitive in their teaching. We believe that all teachers, not just English teachers, need this kind of training because many of the discipline specific concepts are wrapped in language that is inaccessible; it's really hard to separate the two. Instead of concentrating on structural components of the language such as verbs and nouns, we concentrate on how to teach concepts. We examine concepts, observe how they are mediated in language and look at textbooks to see how we can improve the text to make it more meaningful and accessible. This is a particularly relevant course because the demographics in most of our schools in KZN have changed, where 60% of the children are Zulu speaking but are still being forced to use English as the medium of instruction. It is unlikely that we will be able to change this because many students elect to go to these schools for that very reason, so we need to address issues like multilingualism and additive bilingualism.

The course design is a collaborative effort between ELET, the University of Port Elizabeth's language centre, their link with the University of Edinburgh, a consultant there by the name of John Landon, and a British Council consultant, John Clegg, (who helped design our courses like the PETRA and CEMT). Cheron is a leading light in the whole process, in terms of conceptualising it and implementing it at schools. We have tried to introduce an element of rigour in the design process. The pilot project took 2 years, and involved 4 schools in Natal and 4 schools in the Eastern Cape, where it wasn't English teachers but other subject teachers who were trained to become language sensitive in their Science, Maths, Geography and History teaching. They documented their methodology, the successes and failures and they got together at seminars and



shared ideas. As a result, Cheron, together with one of the teachers, presented a paper at the TESOL conference in Vancouver. She was invited also to the Namibia Institute, where she presented the paper. At our annual ELET Conference a year before last, a group of teachers presented their experiences with the project and how they coped with language disability in their classrooms. Department officials who had come to the conference were so impressed that they asked us run the project in the foundation phase. But, although we have an excellent course to offer, the world of funding is an extremely difficult one, and you can never predict the outcome. The funder commits money bilaterally to the Department of Education in Pretoria, in terms of their agenda. So, the funder will not just then listen to an NGO and commit funding for a project, they have to go to the Department and say, "Is this within your scheme of things?" And so we wait... and we wait.

Another area that in my view is in a crisis in this country is the teaching of reading. A systemic evaluation was conducted last year on the reading skills of Grade 3 learners after 3 years of schooling and, predictably, the results were appalling. The majority of children were almost completely illiterate. And the study ascribes this to varied factors. One of them is the fact that the teachers don't have the skills to teach basic reading. With the new curriculum (2005), which is an integrated curriculum, there is very strong thematic approach. The result is that certain basic skills are slipping through. There is nice and fuzzy and warm ambiguity about it... and it is politically correct and quite creative and exciting. So, we have to do something to ensure that the teachers become a little more rigorous with the teaching of certain basics skills, especially reading. One of the problems, in my opinion, is that when you have these very strong thematic approaches, you broaden things but you don't have the vertical progression to go from one step to another. In response to this crisis, the Department of Education has asked ELET to coordinate a conference to focus on this issue.

With regard to the curriculum of our language courses, we have done a lot of research already in the production of materials; we have developed materials that are excellent for mixed mode delivery. I am presently developing a course on reading, exploring the notion of schema theory as a way of activating children's knowledge. Schema theory proposes that children bring with them knowledges of the world that need to be activated in the classroom. It's quite easy to achieve this through reading. With reading, you are engaging with a tangible text, which is already the product of an author's mind, so it is quite easy to activate children's creativity in engaging in prediction and analysis. But it is quite another thing in writing. It involves much more than their knowledge of the world. It requires knowledge about how text is organised, schematic knowledge, coherence and other conventions. This knowledge, which is not easily accessed, means that we have to engage in pre-teaching. There is far too much emphasis on verbalising and too little focus on developing what might appear to be mundane skills, such as constructing a paragraph, developing and sustaining an idea.

I have observed that when you talk about process writing, which is a long and complex activity, there is some resistance based on teachers' assumptions about how time is allocated and what should be taught within a period. You would often hear a teacher say: 'But how can you do all of that in one period? The possibility that writing could be taught in a literature period is a foreign notion. The other thing that I have learned from a group discussion recently (which is perhaps a cultural phenomenon) is that reading for pleasure is foreign to a Black learner. One teacher argued that an absence of a reading

culture accounts for why it is so difficult to persuade learners or teachers for that matter to read. Another member of the group agreed with that view, adding that she noticed how Black people would walk past the fiction stands and go to the "How to" stand. I tried to influence her to accept that one did not necessarily have to read fiction as reading for pleasure, but that one could actually enjoy reading work that is not fictional.

The BBC is particularly impressed with our action project concept, where children identify a problem in their situation - lack of water or dirty toilets - they brainstorm the problem, they research it in terms of what is the cause of the problem, what the solution could be, and then they find a solution to the problem. They attempt a solution, they try it out and then they report on it. All of this is done within a literacy framework where children acquire language proficiency through the activities. The BBC regards this as a useful teaching tool, and wants to share it with other schools in Africa through radio. Frances Cox of BBC has put in a request to her principals for ELET to help develop a script of about fifteen 15-minute programmes, describing the action project and giving examples of it through conversations. ELET will be required to manage the production of the script in collaboration with them. Thereafter we will have to develop the supporting print materials to be distributed throughout Africa. This project will be a three-way collaboration - BBC, British Council and ourselves.

We also run the School's Library Project (SLOT). We receive loads of books from Japan. A group of women in Japan collect these books and ship them to us. They also send us funds to cover the cost of transportation. A number of our graduates approached our library and requested assistance in how to use these books in schools. We have workshops on Saturdays, attended by teachers and conducted by teachers entirely on a voluntary basis. The workshops focus on a range of library competencies, including starting a new library. Teachers select their books and take them away to their schools. To my mind, it is one of the most successful projects. The significant feature of this project is that it is self-funded. Teachers who teach on the course are not paid and teachers do not expect accreditation for it. The weaknesses of the project are two-fold: We are reliant on teachers reporting regarding what they are doing with the books. We do not have the capacity to verify and monitor these reports. We also do not have the capacity to support teachers in the classroom. The second weakness is that most of the books are suited to middle to high schools and very few books are at the lower level. We've tried to remedy this by writing to *Anglo American* for funding but they have refused. One of the things we've realised from this project is that our graduates are empowered by the Language teaching courses and are intent on maintaining links with ELET through courses such as SLOT. We are exploring the possibility with attaching some sort of accreditation for the course, possibly by collaborating with the Natal University library in providing library skills training.

So, despite our many crises at ELET, we have been able to survive, primarily because we are able to mutate in response to changing circumstances. I know that many NGOs have closed down rather than change and adapt to new circumstances, and I think that individuals from these organisations might have become consultants. At ELET, we have also been very sensitive to changing funding criteria. We realised quite early that we were not going to continue receiving grants or handouts or even funding for language related programmes, so we had to start looking for project work. The problem with this kind of work is that we often have to compromise our principles, such as the case of the IMBEWU project. This was an Eastern Cape project, which was conceptualised by the



Eastern Cape and technical advisors, appointed by the funder. All they wanted NGOs to do was provide a prescribed service in certain areas such as train teachers using materials modules that were not prepared by us. Quite a lot of projects are becoming like that now, where we no longer have field workers working in an area with teachers, we just have to deliver. They use the word "deliverables". You deliver a number of workshops, you deliver a number of school support visits and you leave. You have certain time frames and time lines and accountability, and log frames and log jams and a series of bureaucratic and technical requirements. We have to abandon the old style of operation where you had an ELET fieldworker working with about 10 or 15 schools with certain individuals over time, and building up relationships, working together. These in my mind were much more effective than just jetting in, jetting out, the consultant model of operation. And because this can be done on a large-scale, funders prefer it. Quite a lot of the larger funders prefer bigger projects because they don't want to handle smaller projects - it involves too much micro-management - so they prefer having projects involving hundreds and hundreds of schools and they can give finance to some other agencies such as JET who have the capacity to feed them with the paperwork. They don't have to have a relationship with the service provider - it's all businesslike now. While there used to be a hand in hand relationship with your funder, that's gone away, because you don't have funders really, you just have people who pay for your services.

It's no longer about philanthropy. The funder now funds the government and then they agree to appoint service providers who are paid for their work. The bilateral funding has replaced donor funding. Typically, now, the KZN Department of Education would get R20million, and they usually appoint a fund manager because there's politics involved. Quite often, if the money is handed over to the department of Education, it gets spent in other ways, or never gets spent at all as is the current fashion, of returning money to the treasury. Sensing the changing funding climate, ELET made a strategic shift towards sanitation and health. This was an expression of the needs that we felt. This was a shift that responded to the changes in funding criteria away from English towards poverty alleviation and literacy. Coupled with was my growing uneasiness regarding just purely decontextualised language inputs and interventions. And so, it was quite a surprise that we managed to get funding for our health projects. Our goal is to go into things like HIV/AIDS education in a fairly big way, but still keeping the focus from the use of English as a medium, to the use of language as a medium rather than just as a subject in itself. So, in that sense, we have strategically engineered our projects to accommodate the changing criteria of the funders.

AIDS, is becoming infused into just about every area of our lives. As an NGO with deep language roots, we are aware that we risk the possibility of overkill in the manner in which we undertake AIDS education, where one almost becomes numb to these messages. There's an overload of information because people are saturated with it. The real danger that this entire enterprise becomes a mantra, a mantra that everybody chants, but nobody believes-I think one has to think about how to subtly bring it in, almost subliminally, incidentally. We designed some materials on AIDS education based on our tested language for learning model, and everyone was very impressed. I phoned the Department asking to meet with provincial planners, the AIDS team, the coordinators for AIDS, the AIDS counsellors and one of the directors. In response, the director of teacher education in KZN said, "Hawu, but we're doing that."

Notwithstanding these attitudinal obstacles, we have learned significant lessons from our efforts a diversification beyond language programmes such as the PHASE project. Tracy will disagree but I don't think we have been taking it any less seriously than other programmes. To me the project has a vital role to play in reconceptualising the role of ELET in a changing democracy. I'm beginning to conceive of ELET in this new paradigm, not as an English Language Institute, but one that plays a more developmental role within a broader developmental framework. I see the ELET of the future as having three pillars: **This first revolves around English and language issues; The second relates to health and other social issues**, which includes the PHASE project, and life skills, HIV aids and allied health issues. **The third pillar revolves around broader environmental issues, of which Cecil's indigenous tree planting is one.** The Rockefeller Foundation approached us to design a project around the issue of literacy in the context of health, girls' hygiene, girls' sexuality, boys' sexuality and masculinity. We've had this proposal, but we've never really followed it up, and it is significant that they are expressing an interest in this re-configured notion of literacy, which we have always advocated, and which you indicated, has its roots in Paulo Frerie's development of Local literacies through a focus on contextual realities in rural communities in Brazil.

We have been talking about changing the name of ELET to reflect more accurately its new identity, but it is something that I am not quite comfortable with. However, I do think that if this is the direction ELET is moving, and if our survival depends on it, then we need to metamorphose to survive. I also realise that English, as a developmental tool is no longer sufficient for pragmatic reasons. It is clear that increasingly, money is going to be redirected towards social development, but the fear that our teacher development mission is suddenly going to disappear is totally unjustified. I know that for the next ten years at least, with the huge number of under qualified teachers, ELET will be called upon to serve its mission as a language development institution. I envisage that ELET will have a fairly big language for learning project, but the biggest component of ELET will be the teacher development wing to develop teachers to the minimum REQV 13 level. It is estimated that 80,000 teachers do not have this minimum qualification. It will take at least 5 years to train these teachers. We are presently writing the materials for these courses. We could actually continue as an English language institution and continue offering the courses and survive quite comfortably, by developing partnerships with universities. We still have a problem with arriving at a more accurate costing of the courses, which presently results in a degree of cross-subsidisation. Furthermore, fee recovery is a problem as professional upgrading is still voluntary. When it does become obligatory, when the FDE becomes the minimum qualification, then we will have the benefit of insisting that fees are paid before we confer a qualification.

However, we have to temper our optimism with a bit of realism. The year 2002 is certainly the worst ELET has experienced in its history. We have grown accustomed to dealing with crises, but this year, we have been in an extremely vulnerable position to the extent that we did not know where the next pay cheque would come from and we even had to take a cut in our salaries to meet our commitments.

One of the main difficulties we experience now, which is perhaps different from our experiences in the past, is that in the past the kind of work we did necessitated the maintenance of a core of permanent staff. In recent years development work has become project related, but we have retained the core staff. The situation has been exacerbated by the diminution of core funding from R500,000 five years ago to R200,000 last year and

just R50,000 this year. The core funding provided a safety net, which paid our salaries. We no longer have that safety net. The situation has become untenable and we will certainly have to revisit our management structure soon, to respond to the changed circumstances.

We have entered an era of donor cooperation where donors channel funds through large consortiums that respond to the government agenda. These consortiums prefer to fund large-scale projects, which do not require micro-management. NGOs in this new era have been downgraded to service providers. This arrangement favours the larger NGOs (and I'm reluctant to call them NGOs because they have become deliverers and have lost their critical edge). The smaller NGOs will have to pick up the scraps accepting a diminished role as deliverers of a curriculum. We at ELET have been able to preserve our critical edge until now but I am no longer confident that we can continue to be both curriculum deliverer and curriculum activists. We can no longer afford to be mavericks when we are expected to implement government policy”.

### **Concluding Comments**

This chapter has attempted to capture narratively, two decades of ELET's history through the eyes of its members. The focus has been the various influences that have shaped its mutating identity. The narrative will be subject to Discourse analysis in chapters 5 and 6. The following chapter explores a broad range of analytical frameworks in an attempt to find appropriate analytical lenses to interrogate the data.

# Chapter 4

## CRAFTING AN ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

### 4.1 Introduction

No useful theory can rest on the assumption that organisations are unique entities. Equally facile is the assumption that all organisational forms have enduring attributes. It is true that contemporary organisations are remarkably similar in form, structure and behaviour. This is evidenced by the uncanny similarities in schooling systems throughout the world, despite significant variations in other societal dynamics, pre-empting the commonplace assumption in organisational theory, that organisations within an organisational field *will* possess ubiquitous qualities. In so far as the differences are identified in terms of superficial characteristics, rather than fundamental assumptions, the diversity in organisational theory is more apparent than real. While superficially, there appears to be a dazzling array of different theoretical offerings and empirical legacies, a survey of the field indicates that the area has come to be narrowly founded (Burrell and Morgan, 1985). This will become apparent as I attempt, through this chapter, to deconstruct organisational theory to find that it is located within field theories derived from the wider background of management theory as a whole. Hence, much of classical organisational theory has devoted its attention to discovering essences in organisations, as a by-product of the search for improved efficiency and optimal performance. Theorists have a distinct predisposition here, to draw on the classical school of management and administrative theory, developed by practicing managers with little or no social science background (Hassard and Parker, 1994). It is therefore perhaps a sign of relative maturity when a field focuses on variances rather than generating static understandings of patterned behaviour. This chapter will explore some of the more significant theoretical developments relating to organisations over the last four decades as the theory evolves from its earlier foundations in structural functionalism. The purpose of this exercise is to identify an analytic framework to make sense of two decades of biographical data that captures the mutating organisational structure and behaviour of ELET.

My second objective in theorising the data, and this is perhaps a somewhat ambitious objective, is to build an integrative theory that attempts to explain the processes of development in organisations, and to formulate propositions on the relationships between organisational development and the lay ontology<sup>38</sup> of organisational members. I want to begin with the proposition that theory building in organisation studies can be informed by a “double extension, or stretching, towards both philosophy and practitioners’ lay theories” (Calori, 2002). Similarly, Bergson (1983) emphasises the necessity of grounding philosophizing in life experience. Inspired by this challenge, I will attempt to illustrate the links between philosophy and practice, and show that the analysis of

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<sup>38</sup> Assumptions about the ontological nature of phenomena have to do with the essential character of the phenomena under investigation; in particular whether such phenomena have an independent existence, or whether they are simply constructions of our minds. It asks whether objects exist independently of our perception of them. Most organisational theorists, particularly those from the structuralist- functionalist school argue that it does, but a growing number of organisational theorists contest this naive realist position.

participant's narratives can be used to elicit their 'lay' ontologies as a way of making explicit their theoretical orientations. If an individual's thoughts and actions are held to be manifestations of their ontological beliefs and assumptions, and these are expressed or embodied in performance, thoughts and narratives, then those who see being and reality as a continuous movement (a creative dialectical evolution) can stimulate the development of their organisation. More generally, in the words of Tsoukas and Cummings (1997, cited in Calori, 2002), narratives are contextual but they contain 'knowledge of regularities, or scientific principles, or general values, and, compared to conventional scientific accounts, they allow a multiplicity of events to be flexibly connected along time' (p5).

## 4.2 "Organisational Behaviour: A Heterogeneous Field Developed in a Vacuum"

*"Heir to the human relations movement, to certain branches of psychology, to sociology and to Anglo-Saxon behaviourism... organisation behaviour appears to be an immense patchwork, that is open to almost any theoretical or methodological current" (Chanlat, 1994:156).*

Institutional identity and organisational behaviour have their roots in the study of corporate institutions. Although this discipline shows signs of evolution as the theory is applied to public entities, much of the research into organisations remains in the field of corporate business, which seems to place economics at the centre of the universe, redefining the human being as '*homo economicus*', forgetting all else, especially those things that cannot be reduced to some sort of formalisation (ibid.: 157). Increasing attention is being focussed on schools as organisational units, as they negotiate the challenges of postmodernity. However, the literature on the organisational structures of non-governmental institutions as conventional organisations is virtually non-existent. Moreover, the core of non-corporate organisational theory originating especially from the USA, and leading to a form of "chronic intellectual indigestion", (Blunt, 1983: xi), derives from public institutions, particularly healthcare organisations where the organisational dynamics are distinct from non-profit organisations. Therefore, crafting a conceptual or theoretical framework for analysing NGOs requires extrapolation from studies and theoretical positions that are allied but have a different disciplinary focus, sometimes at the expense of being faithful to the original theory. For this reason, I will aim for conceptual accuracy rather than sequential exactitude. Furthermore, since the concepts are often discipline specific, I will confine my attention to those concepts that I believe will be useful in illuminating theoretical constructs that emerge from this study. While it is often difficult to restrain oneself from making judgements about the relative value of theories, there is little merit in placing them on a value scale and relegating earlier theories in the continuum to antiquity, because of their geriatric status. It would be far more useful instead, to apply these conceptual frameworks and theories to empirical data, allowing them to generate new insights into the data, and perhaps into the theory. I commit myself therefore, to follow the approach of theoretical eclecticism in this study. To achieve theoretical inclusiveness, significant attention will be devoted in this chapter to tracing the developmental trajectory of institutional theory and organisational behaviour with a view to locating my own theoretical orientation.



### 4.3 The Classical Theory

What is an organisation? This question should constitute the very basis of organisational analysis, but the answer is not self-evident and different paradigmatic orientations are likely to yield quite different answers to the same question. The word organisation has its roots in the Greek lexicon, which means *organon* - a tool or instrument. According to the classical definition, organisations are constituted of formal rules and objectives, and a system of consciously coordinated activities. The early writings of Simon (1957) and March (1958), portray the organisation as a problem facing and problem solving phenomenon. The focus is on organisational processes related to choice of courses of action in an environment that does not fully disclose the alternatives available, or the consequences of those alternatives (Thompson, 1967). The complexity of the alternatives, which could render the organisation dysfunctional, if appropriate choices were not made, necessitated the adoption of a bounded rationality<sup>39</sup> (Simon, 1957). The development of defensive ideologies, the dependence on institutional values, the existence of internal conflicts expressing group interests all illustrate the many ingredients that constitute the social structure of an organisation (Selznick, 1957:4). Despite their diversity, these forces have a unifying effect on shaping a distinctive identity for the organisation. Selznick suggests that an organisation does not create values in as much it embodies them, and in the process, becomes institutionalised.

An institution, on the other hand, is a natural product of what Morgan and Burrell (1985:17) refer to as the “sociology of regulation”, an attempt to explain the underlying unity and cohesiveness in society in general, and in institutions in particular. This structuralist-functionalist preoccupation is interested in understanding the social forces that prevent the “Hobbesian vision of war of all against all” becoming a reality (Lockwood, 1956, cited in *ibid.*: 17). Institutionalisation, then, is a process, evolved out of discursive group interaction, moulded by needs and pressures to become a responsive adaptive organism. No organisation is completely free of institutionalisation, which may be achieved through aggressive indoctrination, transmission of institutional images and artefacts, and sometimes through emotional identification. As an organisation acquires a distinctive identity, it becomes increasingly institutionalised. In summary, organisations are technical instruments, and as such are expendable. Institutions are more naturalised entities, serving as receptacles of group idealism and are less readily expendable. “Viewed in this light, formal organisation is the structural expression of rational thought” (Selznick, 1948:25).

The classical theory, grounded in functionalism, has several presumptions about the nature of ‘rational man’ that need to be interrogated. Durkheim, Radcliffe-Brown and others developed the analogy of social life sharing the same constituent parts and functional capacities as biological organisms that are found in ecological structures. Institutions, by virtue of their cohesive potential, maintained integration and stability in the social system as a whole. Selznick, sought to develop a goal-oriented theory that took into account both human and structural factors, hence the origin of the notion of structural functionalism. The classical “economic man” or “administrative man”, when presented with decision-making situations ostensibly chooses to act from a set of given alternative possibilities. This assumption suggests, firstly, that all given choices are

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<sup>39</sup> Under norms of rationality, organisations facing heterogeneous task environments seek to identify homogeneous segments and establish structural procedural units to deal with each.

inherently self-defined and 'real', and secondly, that the consequences inherent to each alternative is known and 'real'. How these possibilities come to have such an objective existence is not explained by classical theory (see March, 1958). In the classical conception, choice has been routinised into a kind of fixed-stimulus-response model that fails to account for purposive human action.

From a phenomenological perspective, rationality derives from a referential subjectivity, dependent on and limited to the rational man's knowledge. In their ethnological conception of organisation behaviour, Berger and Luckmann (1967), see humanness as a socio-cultural variable, underscoring the flexibility and plasticity of man in relation to his environment. They suggest that there is no human nature in the sense of a biologically fixed substratum determining the variability of sociocultural formations. Man constructs his own nature, produces himself, and the social order exists only as a product of human activity. All human activity is subject to habitualisation, cast into reproducible patterns to be performed in the future with equal efficiency, freeing individuals from the ardour of making decisions, opening up avenues for innovation. In Berger and Luckmann's conception, institutionalisation occurs whenever there is a "reciprocal typification of habitualised actions by types of actors" (ibid.: 54). Reciprocal specifications are built up in the course of shared history and evolve to become apparently unalterable and self-evident. The institutional world is experienced as an objective reality with a history that antedates the individuals' birth and is not accessible to his/her biographical recollection. In other words, the institutional world is "*objectivated*" in human activity. (Berger and Luckmann, 1967:60), and is 'out there', external to him/her, persistent in his/her reality. This, Berger and Luckmann regard as *externalisation*. Objectification and externalisation are moments in the continuing dialectical process. The third moment is *internalisation*, in which the objectivated social world is *retrojected* into consciousness in the course of socialisation. This consciousness, aided by the power of language, superimposes the quality of logic in the institutional order and forms the basis of knowledge that motivates institutionalised conduct. Radical deviance from the institutional order is designated with labels such as moral depravity, mental disorder or ignorance, and are seen as what Selznick calls "bureaucratic dysfunctions" (Burrell and Morgan, 1985:184).

Although organisational processes figure prominently in social change, in most macrosocial theory, systematic research into organisations appears to have been isolated from the rest of the discipline during the 1960s and 1970s. During this period, organisational sociologists made considerable progress in developing methods for analysing variations in organisational structures and to develop theories to account for this variation (Hannan and Freeman, 1989). However, the field became "preoccupied with a narrow set of static concerns focussed mainly on the interrelations of various aspects of formal structure" (ibid.: 11). During the later 1970s organisational sociology began to return to its roots in political sociology and macro sociology, shifting research from its narrow concerns to the more fundamental questions asked earlier by Marx, Max Weber and other pioneering theorists, particularly about how social and political transformation had affected the world of organisations. The issue of how social and political forces shape organisational identity is one of the central concerns of my research, and I shall return to explore it below.

#### 4.4 Excavating organisational identity

An evolving body of contemporary research on organisational identity studies focuses on a variety of internal determinants and consequences of identity and of the impact of particular identities on decision-making (Cohen and Musson, 2000); others have examined the experience of environmental change and how this shapes identity (Stern and Barley, 1996). Some of these organisations studied have the capacity to carve out identities that are fairly enduring (Meyer and Rowan, 1977) while others respond strategically to shifting environmental conditions (Linstead, 2002). In conceiving the design of this study, I have envisioned two distinct but parallel components: Firstly, the study involves *methodological elaboration* - to find an alternative methodological lens to excavate the many ways organisations are embedded in institutional contexts, and how an organisation is supported and constrained by institutional forces. The biographical approach exemplified in chapter 2 (and which will be critically appraised in chapter 6), has provided illuminating insights into institutionalised features in the form of cultures, relational systems and routines that give ELET its distinctive organisational identity while sharing homogeneous features of other organisations in the field<sup>40</sup>.

The second important component of this study is *theoretical elaboration* - to understand the relationship between organisational environment and institutional identity and how some institutions are able (or unable) to reinvent their identities in the context of environmental pressures (both intrinsic and extraneous). This chapter attempts to find a theoretical lens to explain how NGOs develop their identities in volatile transitional contexts, particularly in those contexts where the changing funding dynamics renders some organisations dysfunctional, while providing opportunities for others. This is particularly cogent when one explores the politics of donor aid (especially corporate funding) and how this agenda influences Organisational identity.

Organisational identity may be characterised in varying ways: members of organisations, in varying degrees, share an implicit/explicit theory of 'who we are' and 'what is the

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<sup>40</sup> Institutional environments encompass organisation fields: Those organisations that, in the aggregate, constitute a recognised area of institutional life: key suppliers, resource and product consumers, regulatory agencies, and other organisations that produce similar services or products. Fields provide consistency and coherence, defining roles for and giving identities to field participants (Scott, 2001). Part of this coherence comes from the presence of institutional logics or sets of material practices and symbolic constructions which constitute a field's organising principles and which are available to organisations and individuals to elaborate. Logics frame and focus the activities of institutional actors, individuals, organisations and coalitions of individuals and organisations - providing them with a dynamic system of meanings and beliefs. Institutional logics both carry and create logics. They conform to the norms of the environment, adopt its schemas and cognitive frames (either consciously or unconsciously) and comply with the dictates of institutional logics, or create new logics through intended or unintended efforts (see Caronna, 2000). A field's belief systems are shaped by professions, state and corporate organisations, and trans-societal actors. These belief systems can be homogeneous or heterogeneous, strong or weak, negotiable or determinant; field governance can be fragmented or cohesive; with the power of various actors varying over time. Variations in belief and governance systems express the field's degree of structuration. Fields that are highly structured have mutual awareness of common meaning systems, agreement on logics, frequent interaction among actors, similarities among organisational forms and clear boundaries (Scott, 2001). A field's degree of structuration, belief systems, institutional logics, actors, and government structures are dynamic and subject to both radical and incremental change over time. The most dramatic transformations of fields- instances of profound institutional change involve multilevel, discontinuous changes that usher in new rules and governance mechanisms, logics, actors, and relations among actors, meanings and field boundaries (Scott et. Al 2000). Most changes are more subtle and more gradual.

organisation'. It is this meaning system that guides their perceptions and behaviour, and perhaps affords the organisation an enduring identity. Its identity may alternatively derive from the uniqueness of the organisation and its capacity to nurture an enduring identity because of its rootedness in its history. However, to survive the rapidly changing environment that characterises a democracy in transition, the success of social and development organisations is determined, not by their ability to preserve durable identities, but to rapidly craft new ones in response to changing environmental dynamics. Earlier studies of organisational behaviour emphasised the effects of the institutional context on organisations within the environment (see Meyer and Rowan, 1977). The institutional environment was viewed as unitary, and organisational conformity was obligatory, because failure to do so would be construed as "normative approbation" (Scott, 2001:151). Later studies (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991) recognise the capacity of individual organisations to shape institutional environments or redefine environments and craft new identities.

It is quite apparent (from our knowledge of popular product brands), that there are benefits to be enjoyed from a relatively stable identity as it reinforces normative behaviour, which can act as a buffer against a hostile environment. However, using organisational identity as a buffer may have unintended consequences: of developing emotional attachments to particular behaviours, modes of operation and programmes. While organisational coherence is a mechanism of social control, it too has unintended consequences: that of cognitive rigidity, constraining innovation, and making the organisation impervious to change when required. This is perhaps by far the single most prevalent quality that has rendered NGOs in the post-apartheid South Africa dysfunctional (Habib, 2002).

#### **4.5 Pillars of organisational identity**

Embedded organisational identities are ultimately mediated by the broader determinants of the cultural field (the field being cultural and functional rather than geographic). Such embeddedness is often a mechanism of legitimacy, as organisations need to be seen to be conforming to normative models that enjoy historical legitimacy (Meyer and Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). The organisational coherence derives from the material practices and symbolic constructions that organisations routinely imbibe from the organisational field and exhibit in their practices. Another source for framing identity is the material resource environment which, through its three pillars, (see Scott, 1995; 2001) *regulative, normative and cultural-cognitive* structures, provide coherence, stability and meaning to a field. The three ingredients form a continuum: from the conscious to the unconscious, from the legally enforced to the taken-for-granted (Scott, 2001:51). The following table illustrates the relationship between the three pillars and their distinguishing characteristics:



Table 4: The pillars of Organisational Identity Scott (2001:52)

Pillar	Regulative	Normative	Cultural-Cognitive
<i>Basis of Compliance</i>	Expedience	Social obligation	Taken for grantedness
<i>Basis of order</i>	Regulative rules	Binding expectations	Constitutive schema
<i>Mechanisms</i>	Coercive	Normative	Mimetic
<i>Logic</i>	Instrumentality	Appropriateness	Orthodoxy
<i>Indicators</i>	Rules Laws Sanctions	Certification Accreditation	Common beliefs shared logics of action
<i>Basis of legitimacy</i>	Legally sanctioned	Morally governed	Comprehensible Recognisable Culturally supported

The *regulative* processes of institutionalisation representing the rational actor model of behaviour, based on conformity and reward, emphasises the rule-setting, monitoring and sanctioning activities. Inherent in this is the capacity of the institution to establish the rules, inspect others' conformity to them and apply sanctions or rewards as necessary, to influence behaviour. DiMaggio and Powell in Scott (2001) regard coercion as the primary mechanism of control. These norms may apply collectively or selectively to individuals within the institution. When applied selectively, institutional norms give rise to roles, which contain their own prescriptions about appropriate behaviour that eventually become internalised.

The *normative* pillar emphasises the prescriptive evaluative and obligatory dimension in institutional life. Norms specify how things should be done, and define the legitimate means of pursuing them. Thus, institutionalised norms serve as both constraints on and building blocks for the construction of identity (Caronna, 2000). The organisational field through its various agents act as coercive forces to pressure nonconforming organisations into submission, often as a precondition for the survival of the organisation. This is especially true if the organisation is dependent on agents in the organisational field for its survival.

The *cultural-cognitive* pillar, proposed by anthropologists, stresses the centrality of the shared conceptions that constitute the nature of social reality and the frames through which meaning is made (Scott, 2001). These institutionalists underscore the cognitive dimension of human existence. The main concern is how individuals locate (and relocate) themselves within organisational boundaries. Central to this question is the philosophical maxim that objects have no meaning in and of themselves. In other words,



man creates, sustains, and refines reality everyday, through symbolic interaction with the world. There can be no one-to one correspondence between situations and action. An interpretation process, whether conscious or unconscious, mediates all personal encounters (Van Maanen, 1977).

This understanding is premised on Schultz's (1962) critical work on the sociology of knowledge, in which he presents a social world comprised of "multiple realities" within which any particular reality, utilized by a person to organise, direct and ultimately justify their actions in the world is dependent upon their socio-temporal location. For every given moment therefore, multiple meanings are possible. Depending on such intertwined variables, as one's past experiences, reference groups, roles, future expectations, the individual actively constructs a reality within which present events are assigned commonsensical interpretations (Van Maanen, 1977).

The three pillars cannot in themselves sustain the organisation. What is needed for sustenance and survival is the additional precondition of *legitimacy*, a belief that an institution's actions are appropriate and desirable within the socially constructed field. However, unlike material resources, legitimacy is not a commodity to be acquired or traded, but a symbolic value that may be exhibited as an indicator of credibility (Scott, 2001:59). In this sense, Organisational legitimacy is contingent upon the degree of cultural support within the context of prevailing norms, whether "traditional, charismatic, or bureaucratic" (ibid.: 59). It must be noted that the structures that 'confer' legitimacy may themselves be contested, and ultimately are a source of contested social power, which acting in concert with other axes of power, can make their power effective. However, Scott argues that "entrenched power is, in the long run, helpless against the onslaught of opposing power allied with more persuasive ideas" (ibid.:60).

In summary, the regulatory dimension emphasises adherence to legal or quasi-legal requirements, and is perhaps the weakest form of legitimacy, because of its coercive inclination. The normative dimension, which is morally governed, is more likely to be internalised because of the possibility of extrinsic rewards. The cultural-cognitive, which is premised on the adoption of a common orthodox identity as the pre-condition for legitimacy is perhaps the "deepest because it rests on preconscious, taken for granted understandings" (Scott, 2001: 61)

#### 4.6 The ecology of organisations

The ecology of organisations is an approach to the macrosociology of organisations that builds on general ecological and evolutionary models of change in populations and communities of organisations. Most of the theoretical and empirical work from the 1970's to 1990's treated organisations as rational, flexible and speedy adapters to changing environmental circumstances, and this variability in structures was accounted for by local adaptations to short term environmental factors (Hannan & Freeman, 1989). There was a tendency for organisational theorists in this period to think anthropomorphically about organisations, that is: the focal organisational action perspective, which sought to explain the actions of single organisations facing environmental pressures. These theoretical insights portray organisations as passive brakes on social changes initiated by interest groups in societies (ibid.: 5). But organisations have come to be known as more than passive actors; in fact, most social changes begin with the actions of organisations. Organisations, constructed as tools for

specific kinds of collective action are far from simple tools, often developing lives of their own, quite distinct from the environments in which they are ostensibly embedded.

The Functionalist approach to understanding organisational behaviour emphasises the potentiality of organisational entities to respond to changes from pressures outside its own structures, but from within the organisational field. This suggests that the impetus for change, and therefore the locus of power, is external to the organisation and that the organisation has no latent capacity for self-generated change. The ecological approach uses the premise of organisational diversity to understand how social conditions affect, among others, the way in which new organisational forms arise, the way in which organisations change, and the reasons why they die. The ecology of organisations also emphasises the importance of the dynamics within organisations, and that the capacity for organisational mutation is embedded within the organisational structures and strategies. The quintessential differences between the two approaches is that the ecological model emphasises the organisational diversity within any realm of activity, such as language professional development, AIDS awareness programmes, or health and sanitation projects, which “constitutes a repository of alternative solutions to the problem of producing sets of collective outcomes..., embedded in organisational structure” (Hannan & Freeman, 1987).

The central thesis of the classic ecological approach revolves around the proposition that organisational diversity is a useful hedge against an uncertain future within a given system or institutional field. A system with higher diversity has the greater probability of having at hand some form that provides the means of coping with the changed environmental conditions. Adaptation to changing contexts might mean reallocation of resources from one organisational form to the other rather than the impracticable option of creating a new organisational form.

It is important to note at this stage, that Hannan and Freeman’s conception of organisational diversity applies to organisations within a broader system or field, rather than to diversity within organisations. In other words, theirs was an attempt at explaining diversity at a macro level. Elsewhere in this discussion I will submit the proposition on the basis of empirical evidence from this archaeological study, that the key tenets of Hannan and Freeman’s theory can be extrapolated from *inter organisational forms* and applied to the micro level of *intra organisational forms*, to explain the subtle and nuanced elements of form which is not always apparent at the macro level of organisational studies that attempt to understand organisational identity and behaviour.

#### 4.7 Crafting Organisational Identities

Organisational identities are generally “initiated by a single individual, or a small band, in a setting conducive in normative and structural openness” (Clark, 1970, cited in Caronna, 2000). As an organisation is formed, it “comes to be stamped with the typical hallmarks of its own historical period” (Selznick, 1949 in Caronna, 2000), imprinted with the social, cultural, and technical features of its environments. Survival as a fledgling is dependent on the role of leaders, dedication of members, creation of a common purpose, and resources from environments (Thornton, 1999). When faced with pressure to change, organisations have a general tendency towards inertia because the historical characteristics that imprint an organisation at its founding are resistant to change (Caronna, 2000). Despite strong inertial tendencies, some organisations do

change their strategic orientations and identities in reaction to external events. When faced with pressures towards isomorphism (this construct will be elaborated in chapter 5 and 6), organisations may change their identities, in limited or drastic ways, to conform and gain legitimacy. Acquiescence, one of the simplest strategies to increase legitimacy (Suchman, 1995), involves altering identity to follow norms, mimic institutional models, and obey rules. Organisations' identities might also be affected by strategies of compromise, in which they attempt to balance expectations of multiple, sometimes conflicting, constituencies and accommodate institutional elements. This raises crucial questions about identity, change and potentiality:

- 1 Can identity persist with multiple ties and commitments?
- 2 Can an innovative identity persist without buffers from pressures to conform?
- 3 Can an innovation survive increasing accountability to outside agencies?
- 4 What kinds of legitimacy strategies enable an organisation to maintain its identity?
- 5 What kinds of strategies lead to intentional or unintentional change?

Suchman, (1995) suggests that the difficulty in theorising institutional identity is that there is no single locus of institutionalisation. This is perhaps because, while issues of *power and conflict* within organisations have long attracted attention of organisational theorists, they have seldom received systematic and sustained consideration. Power and conflict are often studied as isolated phenomena, and are rarely regarded as defining the nature of the organisation itself. Burrell & Morgan (1985) attempt to present a "*pluralist theory*" of organisations, which view them as arenas of conflict between individuals and groups, whose activities are oriented towards the achievement of their own goals and agendas. While I am not entirely comfortable with the notion of plurality because of its liberalist associations, I will adopt the construct here as a way of demonstrating the difference between the unitary and pluralist view because I find these two concepts useful in tracking the theoretical trajectory of the organisational studies movement. The *pluralist* view is presented as an oppositional to a "*unitary*" view which regards conflict as a rare and transient phenomenon, which can easily be eradicated by appropriate managerial action. Because self-interests are regarded as threats to the harmonious order, they are regarded as the creation of deviants and troublemakers. From a pluralist view, conflict and interest are seen as an inevitable and ineradicable feature of everyday life, and the organisation is seen as the "web of cross-cutting conflicts which give it that life" (ibid.: 203). Rather than advocating its removal, the pluralist view emphasises the possibilities of its playing a constructive role, by institutionalising conflict so that it can "find expression and work itself through work" (ibid.: 203). If power is conceived as the locus of organisational existence, then from a pluralist perspective, "the formal goals of an organisation have the status of little more than a legitimising façade, an umbrella under which a host of individual and group interests are pursued as ends in themselves" (ibid.:293). A synthesised version of the two views of organisation is illustrated in the following table:



*Table: 5* The unitary and pluralist view of interests, conflict and power  
(Burrell & Morgan (1994 p.204))

	The Unitary View	The Pluralist view
Interests	Places emphasis on the achievement of common objectives. The organisation is viewed as being united under the umbrella of common goals, and striving towards their achievement in the manner of a well integrated team	Places emphasis on the diversity of individual and group interests. The organisation is regarded as a loose coalition which has but a remote interest in the formal goals of the organisation
Conflict	Regards conflict as a rare and transient phenomenon, which can be removed through appropriate managerial action. Where it does arise it is usually attributed to the activities of deviants and troublemakers	Regards conflict as inherent and ineradicable characteristic of organisational affairs and stresses its potentially positive or functional aspects.
Power	Largely ignores the role of power in organisational life. Concepts such as authority, leadership and control tend to be preferred means of describing the managerial prerogative of guiding the organisation towards the achievement of common interests.	Regards power as a variable crucial to the understanding of the activities of an organisation. Power is the medium through which conflicts of interest are alleviated and resolved. The organisation is viewed as a plurality of power holders drawing their power from a plurality of sources,

Organisational life, from a pluralist standpoint, is a power play between a plurality of power players from a plurality of power sources. The organisation is regarded as a loose coalition that moves towards the achievement of its plurality of aims through an uncertain process of bargaining and mutual adjustment of respective claims. Considerable attention is thus given to providing the structural mechanisms within organisations by instituting rules to fashion such processes without prejudicing the survival of the organisation. It is evident from this discussion that functionalist theory has indeed grown up significantly, as it shifts focus from its commitment to positivism and overdeterminism in its view of human nature, to one that views organisations as ecological systems with the potential for evolution, to sites of conflict and power. However, the paradigm faces critique from within its own ranks, as it does from the outside. One of the more enduring critiques is that the theory has too strong a dependence on models and methods derived from the natural sciences as the basis of social analysis. By implication therefore, constructs borrowed from the organismic view of functional unity such as homeostasis, adaptability and survival are superimposed on organisations as an appropriate basis of analysis (Burrell & Morgan, 1985). Another enduring critique is that the theory is ideologically biased in favour of a managerial view of an organisation. While this might appear innocent in itself, the difficulty is that the biases of objectivism and conservatism associated with social system models are built into the organisational models as the basis of analysis. Hence, notions of conservatism and radicalism are skewed because the models themselves are skewed. Nevertheless,

these theoretical constructs are useful in themselves, to the extent that they provide vantage points from which to understand elements of organisational behaviour. However, of greater interest to me is how various theories within the functionalist domain act in tandem with interpretivist and humanist orientations to analyse organisations.

#### 4.8 The Interpretative Paradigm and the Study of Organisations

Whereas the unit of analysis of the functionalist paradigm was the organisation, the interpretivist sociologist is concerned with the individual, the primary concern being to understand the subjective experiences of individuals. Whereas the functionalists saw social reality as 'out there' and given, interpretivists see social reality as an emergent phenomenon, an extension of human consciousness and subjective experience. Whereas the functionalists saw the environment as ecological, interpretivists regard it as the creation and extension of the subjective experiences of individuals involved. In general, interpretivists reject any notion of structure and, as such, reject any worldview that ascribes a social reality independent of the construction of humankind. Such a view also rejects the notion of an organisation, in the hard and concrete sense that functionalists portray it (Burrell & Morgan, 1985). In fact, the notion of an organisation within the interpretivist paradigm is somewhat contradictory. This phenomenological<sup>41</sup> standpoint fundamentally questions the taken for granted assumptions of everyday life, and its challenge is to transcend the naïve realism of the real world to put it up for scrutiny with the view to accounting for its essences. However, interpretivists have found it difficult to sustain this anti-positivist position, particularly when they attempt to operationalise their ideas within an empirical context. Consequently, they are sometimes guilty of what Bittner (cited in *ibid.*: 266) regards as ontological oscillation. By this, he means that while interpretivists analytically reject the ontological existence of structure, they occasionally lapse into the functionalist orthodoxy in the course of constructing their arguments. For example, Burrell and Morgan refer to Silverman's (1976) work to illustrate the point. Silverman, arguing on the basis of empirical studies of staff-selection processes within an organisation, finds that members of the organisation have 'lay' conceptions of hierarchy, providing evidence in favour of organisational structure. In something of a turnaround, Silverman declares that his position is "not to be construed as a solipsistic<sup>42</sup> denial of the factual character of organisational structures" (Silverman, cited in *ibid.*: 269). A more refined view of his position would be that there is an inherent tendency in organisations towards some form of order. The fact that this order expresses itself in the existence of patterns known as structure is hardly a revelation: more importantly, it needs to be explained. Silverman, (1970) may be regarded as a "radical subjectivist" (Donaldson, 1994). Silverman, an ardent critic of the conventional positivistic movement, introduced a new discourse on radical subjectivism, a philosophy-based critique of the status quo and conventional theorising that emphasises human

<sup>41</sup> Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) is acknowledged as the leading advocate of phenomenology. Phenomenology is a presuppositionless philosophy, which regards consciousness as the matrix of all phenomena, considers phenomena to be intentional acts and treats them as essences (Natanson, 1973 in Burrell & Morgan 1985).

<sup>42</sup> Solipsism represents the most extreme form of subjective idealism which denies the existence of any form of independent reality, other than that which generates from the minds of men. In this relativistic view, objects that apparently exist in the world, such as trees, mountains etc, are purely the products of our perception and have no further existence other than as extensions of our ideas.



subjective experience and meaning on the one hand, and repressive organisational structures on the other. Silverman's work, it is believed, continues to unfold in the postmodernist movement within organisational theory (Cooper & Burrell cited in Donaldson, 1994).

The phenomenological approach regards the whole enterprise of organisational theory as based on very ambiguous foundations, and means different things to different people. The phenomenologists' most strident critique is evident in the following:

*Organisation theorists are seen as belonging to a small and self-sustaining community which believes that organisations exist in a relatively tangible ontological sense and theorises about them. From the phenomenological standpoint, organisation theorists sustain their enterprise by colluding with those whom they attempt to serve, or those to whom they need to make their activities rationally accountable. It is for this reason that contemporary organisation theory is accused of having a managerial bias, using managerial bias to construct theories.*

(Burrell & Morgan, 1985: 273)

This rather disparaging account of organisation theory prompts the question: what can organisation theory learn from the phenomenologists? One of the more obvious lessons would be that social reality should be considered as less concrete, less fixed, less tangible, and more to do with process. It would accord greater significance to individuals and their ability to interpret and sustain social reality. This is the fundamental premise upon which the *radical humanists* view individuals in relation to the social world. I want to explore their perspective very briefly with a view to understanding its notion of *anti-organisation*.

#### **4.9 Radical Humanism and its Anti-Organisation Stance**

The radical humanist movement can be traced back to Sartre and his followers in the French existential movement. They view the world as a product of the individual consciousness, which is projected and externalised through intentional acts, thereby creating the world. Having created the external world, man is trapped by his own creation. Like the interpretivists, radical humanists view organisations as having a very precarious ontological status. The 'organisation' is seen as the alienating force perpetuating the divide between human consciousness and the world, entrenching human domination. The anti-organisational lobby is in its infancy and needs to be developed far more systematically as a theory, supported by appropriate empirical work. However, it does represent a significant break from the orthodox view of organisational reality that characterises much of the contemporary theory on organisations. The following table (Burrell and Morgan, 1985), offers this alternative view of organisational life:

Table 5: Towards a definition of anti-organisation theory: (Burrell & Morgan, 1994: 323)

		Organisation Theory	Anti-Organisation Theory
1	Paradigmatic location	Functionalism	Radical humanism
2	Intellectual source of problems, metaphor and example	Science	The humanities
3	Conceptual focus (level of analysis)	Organisations	Mode of social organisation
4	Society conceptualised as	System	Totality
5	Focus of ontology	Structures	Consciousness
6	Predominant socio-economic problem	Widespread lack of job satisfaction	Universal alienation
7	Generic term for contemporary society	Industrial society; post-industrial society	Capitalism, one dimensional society; corporate state; managerial fascism, etc
8	Man's relationship to nature seen as	Exploitative/competitive	Harmonious
9	Predominant means of production	Industrial factory based technology	Alternative technology (non urban, small-scale, co-operative)
10	Concern for maximization of	Productivity	Human creativity
11	Technology seen as	Positive or neutral force	Negative force
12	Current status of production	Universal scarcity and shortages	Widespread economic surplus available within capitalism
13	Predominant productive mode advocated	Work/labour	Craft
14	Predominant mode of human cognition	Logic	Intuition
15	Human behaviour in accord with	Positive rationality	Value rationality
16	Ethico-political stance	To understand: possibly to alter the system	To understand: certainly to induce a new totality

The significance of this anti-organisational perspective (which I interpret to mean the lobby against the systematic reductionism that organisational theory has experienced as it comes to be narrowly defined within the management sciences), is not that it offers a panacea for understanding organisational behaviour. For me it is a metaphor, borne out of a need to reconceptualise the field of organisational studies, so that it refocuses on an important research mandate<sup>43</sup>: to study the impact of organisations on the broader social

<sup>43</sup> Stern and Barley (1996) suggest that Talcott Parsons, who was one of the most influential organisation theorists of his day, argued that an adequate organisational theory must have three foci: The first was the adaptation of the organisation to the environment it was situated; the second he referred to as mechanisms of implementation and operative goal attainment (the structures and processes of decision-making internal to the organisation); and thirdly, the analysis of the mechanisms by which the organisation is integrated with other organisations and other types of collectives in the total social system, i.e. the role of organisations in the larger socio-cultural system.

systems in which they are embedded (Stern & Barley, 1996). Stern and Barley make a compelling argument for relocating the field of organisational studies (which has been almost wholly appropriated by the management sciences) back to the social sciences. This is not to suggest that organisational studies at the social level is being ignored. On the contrary, studies into social pathologies, family relationships, and healthcare are on the increase. (ibid.: 1996) argue that what is missing is:

*...the systemic or macro-social consequences of filtering life through organisational lenses. This theoretical vacuum at the macro level represents not only a lost opportunity for organisational studies, but a significant failure to exert intellectual stewardship by a field that ritually traces its genealogy to Weber and occasionally even to Durkheim and Marx. To understand how the current state of affairs arose, one must return to the intellectual crucible of the 1950s, the period in which organisational studies first laid claim to its identity (p5).*

In addition to having philosophical implications for how organisational theory is conceptualised in a world where organisational influence is seen as having dramatically altered the structure of society, it also opens up new avenues for redefining what counts as credible methodologies for studying organisational behaviour, an issue which will be discussed at some length in chapter 6.

This discussion has attempted several aims: firstly, it has attempted to excavate the ontological and epistemological foundations of organisational theory as a way of crafting a working definition of the construct. As it turns out, this has been more difficult than I anticipated, as the territory is encumbered with ideological conflicts and contradictions, which necessitates adopting a more tentative definition. We have explored the classical definition, which is grounded in the works of Max Weber, interpreted in the writings of Simon and March to reveal a preoccupation with constructing a sociology of regulation in explaining the basis of institutional behaviour. We then moved on to a central concern of my study: an attempt to explain institutional identity and how this is negotiated within a complex institutional field. I used the work of DiMaggio and Powell; Meyer and Rowan; and Scott's illuminating typology of the three pillars of the material resource environment: the *regulative, normative and cultural-cognitive* structures which provide coherence, stability and meaning to a field. This typology, while landmarking how organisational identities become institutionalised, is unable to locate a locus of institutionalisation, indicating the neglect of the issues of power as central to conceptualising conflict. Adopting Burrell and Morgan's duality, the 'unitary' and 'pluralist' constructions demonstrate organisations to be loose coalitions of power moving towards a plurality of aims, in which the aims are merely a legitimising façade. I then explored the competing interpretivist tradition that rejects the notion of an organisation as a concrete entity but fails to free itself from the structural embeddedness that characterises organisational discourse. I concluded this section by briefly alluding to radical humanism's anti-organisational stance, which does not offer an alternative discourse, but challenges one to reconceptualise organisational theory in fundamental ways so that it graduates from becoming an intellectual indulgence in itself to a means of systematic theorising of how organisational forms and behaviours impact on the structure of society.

## 4.10 The Resource Dependency Model of Organisational Theory

I want to devote the rest of this section to the two dominant theoretical trends that have typified organisational studies in the last half of the last century, in an attempt to provide points of entry, and perhaps points of departure, to an analysis of the identity and behaviour of ELET, as a non governmental organisation, located somewhere in between the public institutional domain, having to negotiate the institutional dynamics of the private corporate domain. The first theoretical tradition that has generated valuable insights into the processes that explain institutionalisation in organisational environments is the *resource dependency* model. I base my discussion on Christine Oliver's (1991) typology, which argues that organisational responses to institutional environments vary from passive conformity to proactive manipulation. Allied to this notion of strategic behaviour is the theoretical tradition of *structuration* popularised by Anthony Giddens (1984), which sees the organisational field as being both constraining of and enabling to human agency. It will be noted from our earlier discussion, that both these theoretical dimensions, which foreground the centrality of power and conflict, have been absent from the mainstream of debates into organisational theory. Infusing this dimension, it is hoped, will relocate the locus of institutional identity and organisational behaviour to issues of power, conflict and agency as the antecedents of structure.

### 4.10.1 Exploring the Resource-dependency model of organisational Behaviour

Earlier work on institutional theory (Berger and Luckmann, 1967; Selznick, 1949) emphasised the pervasive character of institutional rules, which organisations simply imbibe and internalise as accepted social reality. The more recent work has taken a less deterministic position, portraying organisations to be less compliant and more resistant, depending on the context and extent of coercive pressures. Oliver's (1991:146) comparison of institutional and resource dependence frameworks, and their potential for complementarity in explaining organisational resistance and conformity to institutional pressures, is a useful one which I will draw on extensively in the following discussion.

According to both perspectives: institutional, (the regulatory structures) and resource dependence (the task environment), organisational choice is limited by a variety of external pressures and actors; environments are collective and interconnected; and to survive, organisations must be responsive to external demands and expectations (Oliver, 1991:146). Institutional theorists have emphasised the survival value of conformity to the dictates of the institutional environment while resource dependence theorists stress the necessity of "adapting to environmental uncertainty, coping with problematic interdependencies and actively managing or controlling resource flows" (Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978, cited in *ibid.*). Resource dependence theory focuses on the broad number of options and choices available to organisations to actively manipulate external dependencies and exert influence over the allocation of critical resources. The assumption here is that organisations do possess the power to exercise such control within the context of external constraints, but, institutional theorists have tended to focus on "conformity rather than resistance, passivity rather than activeness, and preconscious acceptance rather than political manipulation in response to pressures and expectations" (*ibid.*: 149). Both resource dependence and institutional theories suggest that organisations attempt to secure stability and legitimacy, but that the underlying motives between the two perspectives differ. Institutional theory focuses on the reproduction or



imitation of organisational structure for legitimacy, while resource dependence theorists argue that legitimacy and stability are achieved through the exercise of power, control and negotiation to reduce environmental uncertainty.

From a resource dependency perspective, the advantages of non-compliance flow from the ability to exercise relative autonomy over decision-making, the ability to adapt to new contingencies and the latitude to alter or control the environment in pursuit of organisational objectives. By contrast, institutional theorists have accorded little significance to the potential of active agency and resistance in organisation-environment relations. Organisational dependence theorists argue that organisational responses to institutional pressures will "vary from conforming to resistant; from passive to active; from preconscious to controlling; from impotent to influential; and from habitual to opportunistic (ibid.: 151). Oliver identifies five possible strategic responses to pressures for conformity from the institutional environment. The range of responses varies in the degree of agency, as is illustrated in the following table:

Table 6: A Typology of Strategic Responses to Institutional Processes:

(Oliver, 1991: 152)

Strategies	Tactics	Examples
...Acquiescence	Habit Imitate Comply	Following invisible, taken for granted norms Mimicking institutional models Obeying rules and accepting norms
Compromise	Balance Pacify Bargain	Balancing the expectations of multiple constituencies Placating an accommodating institutional elements Negotiating with institutional stakeholders
Avoidance	Conceal Buffer Escape	Distinguishing nonconformity Loosening institutional attachments Changing goals, activities, or domains
Defiance	Dismiss Challenge Attack	Ignoring explicit norms and values Contesting rules and requirements Assaulting the sources of institutional pressure
Manipulation	Co-opt Influence Control	Importing influential constituents Shaping values and criteria Dominating institutional constituents and processes

The table identifies (in ascending order) the broad repertoire of active organisational responses that organisations may exhibit in response to institutional pressures and expectations, based on the assumption that organisations will both choose to conform to or resist pressures on the basis of their self interests. Their desire to conform is often linked to issues of legitimacy, organisational capacity and the organisation's desire to retain control of resources. For example, an organisation is more likely to acquiesce when the probability of attaining legitimacy from conformity is high, while the strategies of compromise, avoidance, defiance and manipulation are more likely responses when anticipated legitimacy are low. In general, the exercise of power is proportional to the need for legitimacy and control of scarce resources, which in turn dictates the scope of active agency. The implication of the above discussion is that conformity is neither inevitable nor invariably instrumental in securing longevity, while the exercise of agency is not arbitrary.

#### 4.11 Agency and Institutions

The tension between theorists who emphasise structural and cultural constraints on action (Meyer and Rowen, 1977; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983) and those who assert the potential of individuals to transcend these constraints (Giddens, 1984), has commanded much theorising in the history of social sciences. Although the focus of institutional theory has been to account for continuity and constraint in social structures, recent work including that of DiMaggio and Powell (1991) ascribe importance to the way in which both individuals and organisations innovate, act strategically and contribute to institutional change. Rather than conceive of freedom and constraint as irreconcilable binaries, recent sociological thought has tended to regard them as interrelated compatible processes. In understanding the dynamics of institutional structures, my approach is informed by Giddens' (1984:25) concept of "*Duality Of Structures*". This construct refers to the "essentially recursive character of social life" (ibid.) Giddens postulates that in addition to human agency, structuration involves the role of social institutions defined as structured social practices that have a broad spatial and temporal extension - that is, as practices which, apart from operating concretely in time and space, also exhibit a paradigmatic 'structure'. When used with caution, in a way that overcomes the dualistic relationship between agency and structure, Giddens' work transcends much of the reductionist studies of organisation (Willmott, 1994). Giddens differentiates between 'system' and 'structure', portraying social systems as practices concretely situated in space and time while depicting structure as non-temporal and non-spatial, - as a virtual order of differences produced and reproduced in social interaction as its medium and outcome. The 'logic' of the macro-political, economic and ideological spheres both constrains and enables human action and consciousness, while at the same time, this context is reproduced, challenged, or sometimes transformed by human thought and action. Moreover, because human agency is a factor, and because social formations contain contradictions, the potential for social transformation, however trivial, is inherent in all moments of reproduction.

The question that emerges is: how can the individual initiate social transformation when the individual agent is constantly derogated by hostile structures that subvert individual enterprise. Giddens' (1992:374) conception of the "*dialectic of control*" provides a useful attempt at answering these questions. Central to the notion of duality is what Giddens (1992:374), refers to as the 'dialectic of control' in social systems, recognising it to be both product and platform in social action. Social structures exhibit a dual role in that "they are both the medium and outcome of social practices they recursively organise" (p25). Individual actors carry out practices that are both constrained and empowered by existing social structure. He argues that the "weak" have the capability, in the regularised relations of autonomy and dependence that constitute social systems, to turn their weakness back against the powerful. Just as action is intrinsically related to power, so the dialectic of control is built into social systems. Power relations in social systems can be regarded as relations of autonomy and dependence: but no matter how imbalanced they may be in terms of power, actors in subordinate positions are never wholly dependent, and are often very adept at converting whatever resources they possess into some degree of control over the conditions of reproduction in the system. Thus, in any relationship in a social system, the most seemingly powerless individuals are able to "mobilise resources to enable them to carve out spaces of control" (ibid.), in respect of their day-to-day lives and in respect of the activities of the more powerful, altering the overall balance of power. While social constructions impinge on the



individual, these social constructions are themselves shaped by human agency. Agency, then, is a “voluntaristic, non-deterministic theory of action” (Scott, 2001). Exercising agency is the ability to intervene in the world or to refrain from such intervention with the effect of influencing processes.

Efforts to bring agency back into the analysis of organisations have been made by critics of the functionalist and radical structuralist paradigms of analysis (see Burrell and Morgan, 1979). However, Silverman, (1970 cited in Willmott, 1994) challenges the assumption that the behaviour of organisational members can be adequately analysed as an impersonal process reflected in the action of individuals, but quite separate from their intentions. He argues for an analysis that studies organisational work as a product of how organisational members attach meanings to situations. In other words, human behaviour is mediated by the assigning power of consciousness...“organisations do not react to the environment, their members do” (p94). This understanding connects directly to the Foucauldian notion of “subjection” or “subjectification” (p105). Foucault introduces the term to signal the power/knowledge relations that are intertwined with, but cannot be reduced to the concepts of exploitation and domination. Foucault (1982) characterises subjection as a form of power that operates (productively) by defining agency in individualised, self-knowing ways, that “categorises the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes law and truth upon him which he must recognise and which others must recognise in him” (p105).

It is possible to see, through the above discussion, how power relations are sustained within the micropolitics of interaction, as human beings strive to affirm their sense of autonomy and freedom. In an effort to authenticate and sustain a sense of autonomy and sovereignty, people willingly participate in, and reproduce the institutions through which, and from which, their sense of freedom is derived. Willmott (1994) argues that instead of exercising control from above, the social body, “the power is exercised from within... It exemplifies a capillary form of power that reaches into the very grain of individuals” (p106). Subjection is accomplished through modern organisational practices, such as the open plan office or the appraisal system that promote an “accountability of the self”. In this way, individuals are complicit in developing a corporate culture which, in the first instance, derives its legitimacy from consenting agents and, in the second instance, this culture is perpetuated by what Marx refers to as ‘false consciousness’ of agents. Individuals are induced to become consumers of corporate culture as they are presented with opportunities to express their individuality. Their perceived autonomy is affirmed as ‘engineered’ opportunities are created for individuals to enact their agency. In this way, the normative framework designed by the management is internalised, co-opting agents insidiously into realising corporate objectives.

The purpose of this somewhat cynical view of structuration is to caution against adopting a romanticised acceptance or what Munro (1999:1) refers to as a ‘lionised methodological individualism’ of the power of agency. It is also a sobering reminder that if freedom and autonomy are at the heart of the human endeavour, then freedom is indiscriminating, since all power/knowledge relations are “potential seducers of human agency, all are equally vulnerable to the recalcitrance of the will, and all are to be viewed with suspicion” (Foucault, 1982 cited in Willmott, 1994:114). Foucault argues that power relations do not reside in a separate dimension above society as a supplementary structure, whose radical effacement one could perhaps dream of. Foucault also stresses



that the apparent inevitability of power does not connote that the existing power relations cannot be undermined. However, Willmott (1994) is not impressed with this relativist position. Quoting Rorty (1985), he notes: Foucault “forbids himself the tone of the liberal sort of thinker who says to his fellow citizens: ‘we know there must be a better way of doing things than this; let us look for it together’” (p114). Willmott accuses Foucault of deconstructing power relations as an end in itself, an end that borders on nihilism.

#### 4.12 Towards an Anthropology of Organisations

This study makes no pretensions about being able to deconstruct power relations in any less a nihilistic way than Foucault has done, or finding better ways to study organisational identity and behaviour than has been the practice since the dawn of the discipline. What I might possibly achieve instead, is establish an *anthropology of organisations*, one that does not accept singular or unitary accounts of organisational behaviour because we know that they are bound to be partial and reductionist. However, adopting this approach requires that I simultaneously take care not to reject any of the established traditions of enquiry, from positivism to postmodernism, because doing so would equally give an incomplete and imperfect construction. The anthropological approach is one that commits itself to the restoration of the human being to the centre of enquiry, not as *homo-economicus* but as *homo-sapien*, the ultimate unit of analysis. In using the anthropological approach as the foundation of acquiring knowledge, we are in a better position to observe human experience as it is actually lived within the organisational universe (Chanlat, 1994).

What then are the methodological implications if one embraces the anthropological approach? In the first instance, it acknowledges as the starting point, that no single description of the organisation could ever be complete. The common duality of agents and structures has no discernible boundaries, or, if it does, such boundaries are reversible. Expressed differently, Law, (1994:249) regards an organisation as a “verb rather than a noun: it is a reactive verb - its expression represses, or suppresses sources of energy which it either seeks to deny or cannot know; organisational incompleteness is not, as we used to believe, a problem to be rectified, instead, it is given in the nature of organising that this will embody paradoxes and opposites”.

Using as a starting point the premise that there can never be certainties, we attempt to understand the ways in which organisations seek to order themselves reflexively, by offering narratives that describe the recursive process of controlling an uncertain world (Law, 1994). It resists the temptation of submitting to the master narratives of transcendent subjects, creating instead more narratives that generate more awkward and destabilising questions. Indeed, the act of telling stories has its own virtues in that we are all storytellers as we simultaneously constitute, and are constituted by the stories we tell, or sometimes more significantly, by the stories we don't tell. In my quest to develop a theoretical/analytical framework that is inclusive rather than exclusive, I have tried to accompany the reader on a long journey from the earlier casting of the hapless organisation struggling to control resources in a hostile environment inhabited by the domiciled individual bounded by institutional structures. However, in embarking on this journey, we have not escaped the inherent dualities in these paradigmatic discourses. As suggested by Willmott (1993b), the ‘paradigm mentality’ locks us into a perspective based on mutually exclusive ways of thinking about research. What the paradigm



mentality does not acknowledge is that the philosophical assumptions which are understood to 'underpin' research are themselves discursive effects rather than being foundational axioms (Rhodes, 2000:1)

The paradigm mentality reduces theory-building to a form of "intellectual imperialism" (Hassard and Parker, 1993:19), one which fails to acknowledge the basically uncontrollable nature of meaning. The main postmodern positions in organisational analysis appear to be successful in inhibiting theory-building, albeit in an unconscious way. On the one hand, the epoch position provides positivist descriptions, which are developed with scant reflection on the philosophy of postmodern analysis. On the other hand, the epistemological position explodes the myth of the structural form, but fails to account for the everyday experiences of social actors. As such, neither develops a framework in which formal organisations is acknowledged as a phenomenon which is accessible to postmodern deconstruction (Hassard & Parker, 1993:19). Is it possible to conceive of a "multi paradigmatic" approach to organisational studies proposed by Rhodes (2001); or a "post paradigmatic organisation studies" as suggested by Stephen Ackroyd (1994); or to permit a state of "paradigm proliferation" (Lather, 2001); or can we speak of a 'paradigm heterodoxy' (Hassard, 1993)?

These and other questions will be the focus of the next and subsequent chapters, but before we venture into this hazardous but potentially exciting territory, we need the tools by which to carve the paths of enlightenment. The question of *discourse*, and the manner in which it shapes our epistemology and understanding of organisation, are central to an expanded realm of organisational analysis. It is one which recognizes that the modern world we live in, and the social artefacts we rely upon to successfully negotiate our way through life, "are always already institutionalized *effects* of primary organisational impulses" (Chia, 2000). My understanding of discourse is based on Fairclough's (1992) proposition that language is not random or individual, but that institutions and social groups articulate their meanings and values *systematically*. Hence, discourse is a mode of action, enabling individuals to act upon the world and especially upon each other. It is simultaneously a mode of representation. Secondly, it implies that there is a dialectical relationship between discourse and social structure, there being more generally such a relationship between social practice and social structure: the latter is both a condition for, and an effect of, the former (Cohen & Musson, 2000).

This resonates with Fairclough's (1992) and Bakhtin's (1981) position that discourse must be seen as both shaped by and reflective of social structure, and constitutive of this structure: 'Discourse is a practice not just of representing the world, but of signifying the world, constituting and constructing the world in meaning' (Fairclough, 1992: 64). Discourses, then, do not simply represent reality, as experienced by a particular social group or institution, but they are also dynamic, serving to construct versions of reality. Furthermore, discourses are also carriers of ideology, ideology being understood as a relatively coherent set of assumptions, beliefs and values about aspects of social reality, which is illuminated in a selective and legitimizing way, restricting autonomous critical reflection and sometimes favouring sectional interests (Cohen & Musson, 2000).

Seen in this way, Discourse, is the embodiment and articulation of ideology. However, while ideology and discourses 'frame' the way people see the world, it does not mean that people are rigidly trapped within this framework. Neither are they constrained from creatively reworking the specific discourses and ideologies which characterise their

particular realities (ibid.: 4). On the contrary, individuals appropriate specific discourses according to their particular circumstances. Discourse is a hegemonic process, where dominant social groupings exert power and influence over others through negotiation through a variety of mechanisms, which I will explore in chapter 5.

Therefore, social objects and phenomena such as ‘the organisation’, ‘the economy’, ‘the state’, do not have an unproblematic existence independent of our discursively-shaped understandings. Instead, they have to be forcibly carved out of the undifferentiated flux of raw experience. The last section of this chapter explores briefly the role of discourse analysis in organisational theory. However, rather than provide an explication of the regularised features of this well established tradition, I want to destabilise it, and simultaneously interrogate those elements that prevent it from being instrumentally usable in understanding how we construct organisations and cultural extensions of the social world. I draw my inspiration here from Robert Chia’s (2000) brilliantly provocative debate on discourse in which he proclaims discourse analysis to be organisation analysis.

### 4.13 Organisation as Discourse

The notion that reality is socially constructed is a truism that no self-respecting theorist will dispute. However, what is less clear is how these realities are constructed and what sustains them. What we do know is that through the discursive process of “differentiating, fixing, naming, labelling, classifying and relating - all intrinsic processes of discursive organisation - that social reality is systematically constructed”(Chia, 2000:1). These multiple significations become inscribed in time and space and assume an aggregated version of social reality to the exclusion of other worlds (ibid.). Chia argues that it is anomalous therefore to speak about ‘organisational discourse’ as discourse *about* some pre-existing, thing-like social object called ‘the organisation’. He further argues that “to do so is to commit what the mathematician-turned-philosopher Alfred North Whitehead (1926/1985) called the ‘Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness’ (p. 64) whereby our socially constructed *conceptions* of reality are unreflexively mistaken for reality itself”. He adds that it is this fallacy which has led to either the rejection of the study of discourse as being inappropriate to organisational analysis, or the more popular formulation of ‘Organisational Discourse’ as discourse *about* organisations or about what goes on *within* organisations. Chia contends that:

*...both claims miss the true significance of discourse analysis as a central feature of organisational analysis. Such formulations miss the essential point that discourse acts at a far more constitutive level to form social objects such as ‘organisations’ by circumscribing selected parts of the flux of phenomenal experiences and fixing their identity so that it becomes possible to talk about them as if they were naturally existing social entities. This ‘entitative’ form of thinking, which is widespread in organisational theorizing, conveniently forgets the fact that organisational action is first and foremost an ontological activity (Chia: 2001:1).*

This perspective is a fundamental departure from the structural functionalists’ view of the apparent solidity of social phenomena such as ‘the organisation’. In this view, organisations derive their stability from generic discursive processes rather than from the presence of independently existing concrete entities. In other words, phrases such as ‘the

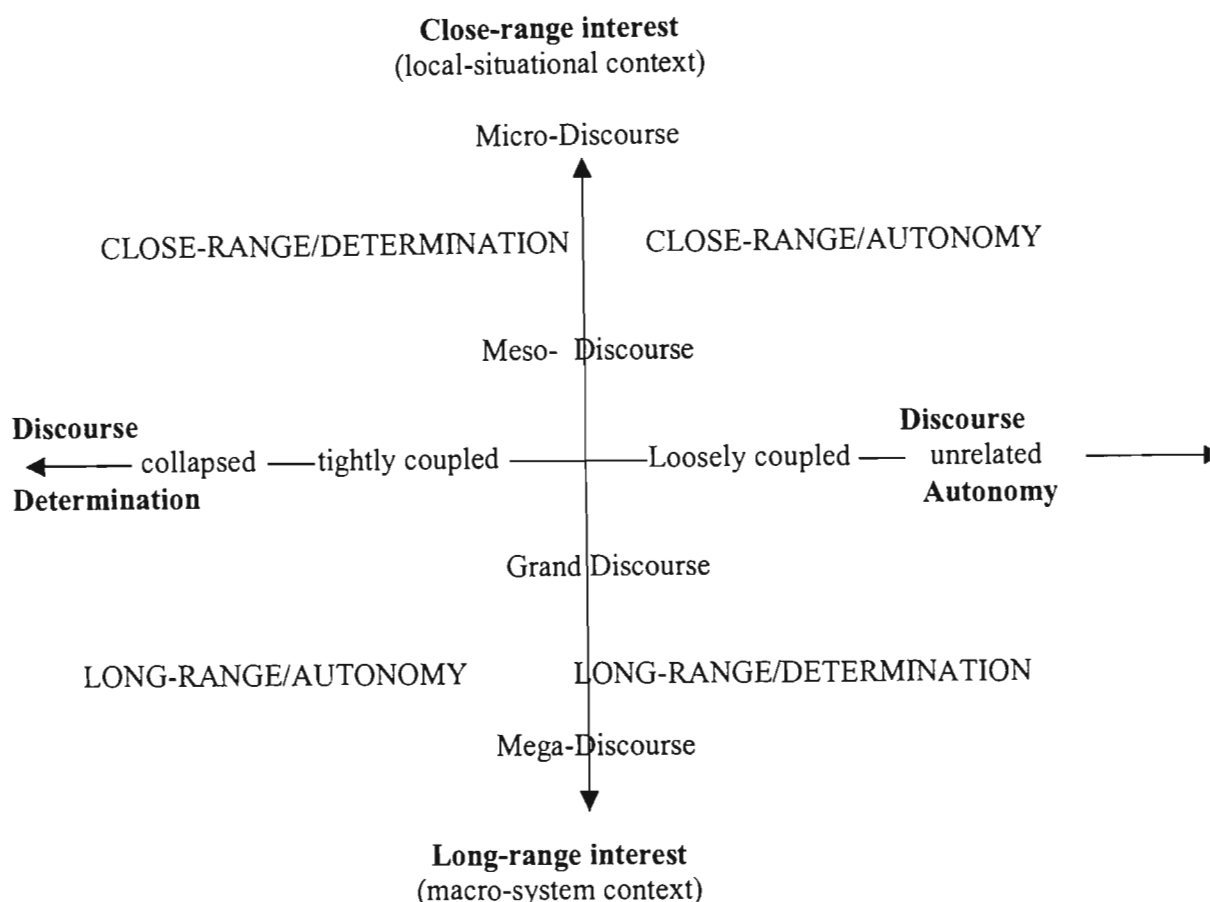


organisation' do not refer to an extra-linguistic reality. Instead, they are conceptualized abstractions to which it has become habitual for us to refer as independently existing 'things'. 'Organisational Discourse', therefore, Chia argues, must be understood, not in the narrow sense previously discussed, but in its wider ontological sense as the bringing into existence of an 'organized' or stabilized state. Consequently, discourse creates a coherent, stabilized world with a sense of stability, order and predictability to what would otherwise be a nebulous, formless undifferentiated reality. It achieves this by inscribing into language and utterances material, codified forms that constitute the foundation of language and representation. This then becomes regularized and made routine through social exchanges, leading to the formation and institutionalization of codes of behaviour, rules, procedures and practices. The world we have come to inhabit achieves an apparent familiarity and regularity, which is consistent with our consciousness, through the internalization of these discourses.

Alvesson and Larreman (2000) clarify the relevance of discourse analysis for organisational analysis and offer some key theoretical positions in the methodological problem of the relationship between: a) the level of discourse produced in interviews and in everyday life observed as 'social texts' (in particular talk); b) other kinds of phenomena, such as meanings, experiences, orientations, events, material objects and social practices; and, c) discourses in the sense of a large-scale, ordered, integrated way of reasoning / constituting the social world. In particular, they explore the relationship between 'micro and meso-level' discourse analysis (i.e. specific social texts being the primary empirical material) and 'grand and mega-level' discourse (i.e. large-scale orders). Alvesson and Larreman suggest that one option is to take an interest in discourse at close range, focussing on the local, situational context. Here, language use is understood in relationship to the specific process and social context in which discourse is produced. At the other extreme they conceive of discourse as "a rather universal, if historically situated, set of vocabularies, standing loosely coupled to, referring to or constituting a particular phenomenon" (ibid.: 9). We may talk about long-range, macro-systemic discourse or of 'middle-range' discourse. Alvesson and Larreman (p9) identify four versions of discourse analysis:

- (1) Micro-discourse approach – social texts, calling for the detailed study of language use in a specific micro-context;
- (2) Meso-discourse approach – being relatively sensitive to language use in context but interested in finding broader patterns and going beyond the details of the text and generalizing to similar local contexts;
- (3) Grand Discourse approach – an assembly of discourses, ordered and presented as an integrated frame. A Grand Discourse may refer to/ constitute organisational reality, for example dominating language use about corporate culture or ideology;
- (4) Mega-Discourse approach – an idea of a universal connection of discourse material. Mega-Discourse typically addresses more or less standardised ways of referring to/constituting a certain type of phenomenon, e.g. business re-engineering, diversity or global-ization.

**Figure 1:** Elaboration of core dimensions and summary of positions in discourse studies.  
(Alvesson & Larreman, 2000:11)



Although discourses manifest themselves in different ways, methodologically they are treated as being of a more or less standardized nature. Alvesson and Larreman argue that it is possible to cut through the variation at the local levels through summaries and syntheses that identify overarching themes operating in specific situations. Overall categories and standards then tend to be privileged in the treatment of empirical material. In chapter 6, I attempt a micro and meso analysis of the narrative data by exploring recurrent themes. These themes are sometimes generated by the data. At other times, they derive from the conceptual and theoretical frameworks.

Viewed through discourse lenses, it is not difficult to see why the structuralist functionalist canon of organisational studies (which continues to be the dominant paradigm) has not been able to unshackle itself from its somewhat contracted and deterministic view of the world. The commonsenses that have become inscribed into the prevailing canon prevent organisational theorists from looking beyond particular 'legitimised' forms of knowledge through a limited set of epistemological preferences. This conceptual filter, which operates at an unconscious level, inhibits the exploration of any conceivable alternative images of organisation, guaranteeing the perpetuation of organisational forms, as we know them.



This poses a potentially paralysing bind: firstly, as Chia suggests, “a language is quintessentially a modern method for organizing thought, we can only begin to fully appreciate the fundamental character of organisation by first examining the workings of language itself” (p3). This requires that we comprehend how “discursive modalities” (ibid.: 3) come into existence, how meanings are ascribed and shaped, and what representational forms get privileged and enshrined. The difficulty, Chia argues, is that we can only use language to express our understanding of the organisational character of language itself. As such, the study of discourse *as* organisation “needs to be approached elliptically rather than in the traditional direct and assertive manner” (p3). The elliptical requires us to excavate that ‘pristine experience, unwarped by the sophistication of theory’ (Whitehead, 1929: 240, cited in Chia, 2000) in order to rediscover the meaning and effect of organisational action. What this requires us to do is adopt a strategy of analysis, which “acknowledges the primacy of vagueness or undifferentiatedness as the aboriginal ‘stuff’ of reality” (p3). Chia argues that the only way to accomplish this is to abandon the long-held Aristotelian belief that language in general, and linguistic categories in particular, are fully adequate to the task of describing reality, if we are to appreciate the workings of discourse as organisation.

How do we extricate ourselves from the bind? We begin by acknowledging the intrinsic inadequacy of discourse to communicate deeper truths, but admit that it can serve a useful purpose in our lives by “transforming a difficult and infrangible reality into a resource at our disposal” (p3). We acknowledge the limitation of disciplinary knowledge as being exclusive and intolerant of epistemological dissent. However, rather than adopt a stance of incapacitating nihilism, we begin to look through both lenses of the empirical binoculars. We revisit the value of transdisciplinary research as a way of crossing paradigmatic borders, not merely as an academic indulgence to bring together different disciplines and theoretical–analytical frameworks in the hope of producing richer insights into new ideology. We also see the prospect of how a dialogue between two disciplines and frameworks may lead to a development of both through a process of each internally appropriating the logic of the other as a resource for its own development. In the eloquent words of Chia:

*...through its strategy of differentiation and simple-location, identification and classification, regularizing and routinization, discursive action works to translate the difficult and the intransigent, the remote or resistant, the intractable or obdurate into a form that is more amenable to functional deployment. (p4).*

We do not have absolute latitude to refashion ourselves and the world according to our idiosyncratic predispositions. But neither are we the hapless prisoners of our linguistic, discursive and cultural framework. Whether we like it or not, real-world objects, structures and constraints will ‘come calling’ on our cherished beliefs, constructions and discourses (ibid.). An acute and omnipresent awareness of our inherent vulnerability and fallibility as researchers, as well as the tools with which we undertake our intellectual labour, will not free us from intellectual culpability. It will ensure that we vigilantly explore new, richer and less parochial ways of studying institutional theory and organisational behaviour, and perhaps more importantly, it is potentially more attentive to subjugated knowledges and lay ontologies.

In this concluding section, I want briefly, as a prelude to data analysis, provide a theoretical exposition of lay ontologies and suggest why I think it is relevant to this

study. One of the more persistent questions in organisational studies is whether one should adopt a realist or a constructivist approach to explain organisational phenomena. Touskas (2000:1) suggests that “this is an unhelpful question which can only arise within the context of a representationalist notion of knowledge; outside such a context the question ceases to be interesting or important”. If we adopt the realist’s representationalist view of organisation, we suggest, implicitly, that our knowledge represents the world as it is, and imposes a sense of closure on institutionalised meanings, denying the role of history and the scope of agency in determining organisational identity.

The notion of lay ontologies is derived from Henri Bergson’s (1907/1983 in Calori, 2002) “ontology of creative evolution”. According to the concept of creative dialectical evolution, the development of an organisation will be grounded in organisational capabilities, which originate in the following lay ontology of its members:

- (1) They have the intuition of duration, seeing time as a continuous flow that allows the preservation of the past and creation in the present.
- (2) A holistic conception of space, its unity and its multiplicity.
- (3) A historical and prospective view of being, as a ‘being made’.
- (4) The intuition of deterministic influences from the past and from the system in which beings evolve, the virtues of intents, the limits of planning and the driving force of their vital impetus, imagination and will.
- (5) The intuition and the respect of individuality (their own individuality, the individuality of their group, their organisation . . . ) and integration with others, as necessary to creation and progress.
- (6) The intuition of a hyperdialectical movement driving development.

One of the intended outcomes of this study, as discussed at the beginning of this chapter, is to explore practitioners’ lay theories and ontologies, and to determine the extent to which these explain organisational identity. The purpose is to build an integrative theory explaining processes of development in organisations and to formulate propositions on the relationships between organisational development and the lay ontology of organisational members. Based on an adapted version of Bergson’s analytical model, I engage in an analysis of narratives of key participants in this study, Mervin, Tracy and Teboho, in an attempt to elicit their lay ontologies to understand how these influence their behaviour and that of the organisation.

In order to conduct research that goes ‘beyond’ language the researcher must systematically consider and critically evaluate the empirical material in terms of situated meaning versus a meaning that is stable enough to allow transportation beyond the local context. Alvesson and Larreman (2000) argue that conventionally, three interpretations are possible: (1) statements say something about social reality (e.g. leadership behaviour, events); (2) statements say something about individual or socially shared ‘subjective reality’ (experience, beliefs, stereotypes, cognition, values, feelings or ideas); and (3) statements say something about norms of expression, ways of producing effects (e.g. impressions, identity work, legitimacy) or something else where accounts must be interpreted in terms of what they accomplish rather than what they mirror – as action rather than in terms of true/false (ibid.: 24).

The next chapter explores a range of texts, verbal and written in an attempt to provide insights into the role of individuals in their various capacities, as they influence the identity of an NGO in a transitional democracy. It explores the lay ontologies (intuition of the nature of being) of organisational members through their reflections of their lived experiences as manifest in their stock of knowledge. The analysis of practitioners' narratives, it is hoped, will reveal their lay ontologies and provide deeper understandings of how these ontologies shape organisational behaviour and influence organisational development.

## Chapter 5

### Vignettes, Freeze-Frames and Snapshots: an Archaeological Glimpse at NGO Identity in a Transitional Democracy

*"Any intelligent fool can make things bigger, more complex, and more violent. It takes a genius - and a lot of courage to move in the opposite direction" <sup>44</sup>*

*Albert Einstein*

#### 5. Introduction and Orientation to Chapter

The archaeological approach to excavating institutional identity involves a form of institutional ethnography (IE), which has its roots in the grounded theory approach to empirical inquiry associated with the prominent Canadian social theorist Dorothy E. Smith. Combining theory and method, IE emphasises connections among the sites and situations of everyday life, professional practice, and policymaking. Such connections are accomplished primarily through what Smith has labelled "textually-mediated social organisation". The method is ethnographic, but more concerned with political-economic contexts and is sensitive to textual and discursive dimensions of social life. In excavating the institutional ethnography of ELET, as a tool for tracking its mutating identity, I have resisted adopting a singular theoretical framework, but have adopted Lather's notion of "paradigm proliferation". Hence, I will call upon a bouquet of theories and conceptual frameworks to guide the data analysis in the hope of generating new insights.

This chapter is divided into three sections. **Section A** engages in a systemic exploration of ELET as an organisation in evolution, in an attempt to understand the influences that shape the mutating identity of a language development NGO in a transitional democracy. It explores the enabling and constraining forces that have shaped its character, paying particular attention to the role of individuals within the organisation in giving it its distinctive yet dynamic character. It also explores other extraneous influences in the institutional field that impinge on the ethos of the organisation: the roles of donors and funders; the macro-economic forces in the context of globalisation; the influence of a volatile higher education policy process and the unpredictable character of the development industry. Using selected vignettes – and the equivalent of the camera's freeze frames and snapshots - from the institutional biography, the chapter also considers the organisation's responses to a variety of isomorphic pressures and the extent to which it was able to exercise its agency as a development organisation.

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<sup>44</sup> One of the many quotations to be found on the walls of Tracy's office at ELET.



**Section B** of this chapter focuses on how ELET manifests this agency through an examination of the contribution it has made in the field of language teacher professional development. Based on an intensive document analysis of its teacher education curriculum, this section interrogates the organisation's contribution to literacy development as well as whole school development (WSD) through an analysis of its Programme for Health and Sanitation Education (PHASE). This programme will form the basis of the curriculum analysis because it constitutes a significant component of ELET's teacher development activities in relation to its other development activities. Another reason for this choice is that the programme espouses an emancipatory, critical literacy framework, a claim that will be appraised against a design analysis framework, to determine the theories, principles, assumptions and methods that underpin the curriculum. The design analysis framework will also examine whether the curriculum policy is relevant to the macro national curriculum framework and, more importantly, whether it is contextually relevant and appropriate for its intended audience.

This section also interrogates ELET's contribution to language development and how it has responded to the official policy of multilingualism. I attempt this through an analysis of its language-teaching module, which ELET designed as a core module for the nationally accredited "Advanced Certificate in Education". Since this programme also espouses a critical language literacy orientation, I once again engage in a design and policy analysis of the curriculum to appraise its emancipatory intent and its emancipatory potential.

Having engaged in a systemic and programmatic appraisal of ELET in sections A and B, **Section C** attempts to destabilise the possible portrayal of ELET as an organisation besieged by systemic injustices not of its own making. This section adopts a more critical view of ELET, exploring whether or not the organisation is (partially at least) responsible for the 'crisis' it finds itself in.

In chapter four I introduced the notion of organisation as discourse and proposed discourse analysis as an alternative framework for understanding organisational behaviour, because I found the dominant structuralist-functionalist canon of organisational studies inadequate in accounting for the organisational structures of NGOs. In this chapter, I appropriate discourse analysis as an analytical lens to illuminate the systemic institutional dynamics that emerge out of the narratives in section A. I also appropriate the lens to highlight the consonances or dissonances between the espoused curriculum (as reflected in selected documents) and participants' discourses (derived from the institutional biography). The analysis will revolve fluidly and discursively around three broad themes: I focus on the **institutional dynamics**, which are influenced by individual identities and interpersonal relations and which comprise the psychological and emotional domains of organisational life; I focus on the role of the **corporate world** and how, through its coercive, mimetic and normative isomorphic pressures, it either forces the organisation into submission or inspires agentic resistance; Finally, I explore the **Higher Education** sector and examine how the **state** through its influence on the HE policy processes, enables or constrains ELET's development mission.

The above themes serve merely as framing devices and are not intended to connote any hierarchy of significance, nor do they purport to correspond to any 'reality' 'out there'. Instead, I am mindful of Robert Chia's challenge that mainstream or 'modernist' thinking and theorising in the social sciences in general and in organisation studies in

particular... which make knowledge and knowledge claims possible, is 'skilfully avoided'. "Organisation analysts write about organisations conveniently excluding a deliberate analysis of the very organisational contexts within which they themselves are constrained to operate" (Weiskopf & Willmott, 1999:561). Chia's challenge is to provide "deconstructive insight into organizing processes and thereby disclose the problematical and precarious status of knowledge claims about 'organisation'". Rather than participate in the accumulation of seemingly authoritative bodies of knowledge about organisations 'out there', I regard this deconstructive analysis as 'an intellectual journey without destination' (Chia, 1996:20 in Weiskopf & Willmott, 1999:561).

I embark on this journey borrowing from Chia, a vehicle that posits **Discourse as Organisation**. The etymological meaning of the term 'discourse' is 'to run, to enter, to and fro'. In other words, to discourse is to run to and fro and in that process create a path, a *course*, a pattern of regularities out of which human existence can be made more fixed, secure and workable. Therefore, discourse is first and fundamentally the organizing of social reality. From this perspective, Chia (2000) argues, the idea of a discourse *about* organisations is an oxymoron. Discourse itself is a form of organisation and, therefore, organisational analysis is intrinsically discourse analysis. Organisation, Chia suggests, should not be thought of as something performed by pre-existing 'agents'. Instead, the agents themselves, as legitimized objects of knowledge, must be understood as *effects* in themselves. "The identity of the individual agent is constructed in the very act of organizing." (Ibid.: 518). The value in viewing discourse as organisation is that it helps practitioners understand better, how they have come to develop deeply entrenched habits of thought, which circumscribed their identities, and how these are inscribed into the organisation. It is with this theoretical impulse that I interrogate the discourses of the central participants in this study to help in understanding how individuals within organisations construct their social worlds, "how the flux and flow of the world is arrested and regularized and then translated into pragmatic use" (ibid.: 519).

In a similar study, Hardy et al., (2000), through their incisive research investigate "Discourse as a strategic resource". Using an illustrative example of an international NGO operating in Palestine, they show how an individual brought about strategic change by engaging in discursive activity. Their model consists of three "circuits" (ibid.: 1). First, in circuits of *activity*, individuals attempt to introduce new discursive statements, through the use of symbols, narratives and metaphors, aimed at evoking concepts to create particular objects. These activities must intersect with circuits of *performativity*. This occurs when, for example, concepts are contextually embedded and have meaning for other actors; when symbols, narratives and metaphors possess receptivity; and when the subject position of the enunciator warrants voice. Second, when these two circuits intersect, *connectivity* occurs as the new discursive statements 'take' (ibid.: 1). Hardy et al. (2000) identify two dominant approaches to discursive practice. The first draws on postmodern theory, narrative theory, and critical discourse analysis. In this approach, strategic discourse is seen as a space in which language and action constitute each other. Hence, specific managerial actions or practices, such as acquisitions, restructuring, or selling in overseas markets, help to constitute the discourse of strategy. This, they argue, is similar to the way in which research questions are posed, methodologies selected and publishing conventions imposed, which helps to constitute strategy as a field of inquiry. Consequently, 'strategy' – like 'the environment' and 'the organisation' – is a construction, reproduced by a variety of texts and practices that serve to make sense of the world. In this approach, it is argued, strategy discourse does not simply mirror social

reality – it creates it. The ways in which one talks about strategy – as well as the ways in which one analyses particular actions that are categorized as strategic, have significant implications for how organisations craft their identities.



## SECTION A:

### 5.1 Discursive Environments: Setting the Conditions of Possibility

#### 5.1.1 Strategic Planning: Strategic Resistance

The ELET “story” which constitutes the data for this study opens with a scene from a strategic planning meeting (SPM), which put up for scrutiny a range of crucial issues affecting ELET’s identity. Among the strategic imperatives are issues of labour, job descriptions and the precarious financial status of ELET. The choice of the SPM is in some senses an act of serendipity because I had not intended it to have any significance other than for its usefulness as a narrative technique, as a point of departure, and a point of return, to cohere the various narrative strands as I represented the data in a novelistic form. As it turns out, the reference to ‘strategy’ has generated unintended consequences. It has acquired significance in exploring issues of organisational identity, in particular how a corporate conception of strategy is mobilised as a strategic resource in shaping the character and behaviour of an NGO.

For ELET, strategic planning meetings in the past were usually proactive. They represented:

*an attempt to charter a common vision for members as well as an attempt to be collectively responsive to developmental challenges as they unfolded. The strategic planning of 2001 was arguably one of the turning points in ELET's history, in that for the first time, the meeting was reactive rather than proactive. It attempted to charter a new strategic vision to navigate ELET through a current of new developmental challenges (chapter 4)*

Why should **this** strategic planning meeting be considered a ‘turning point’ and what are the developmental challenges that necessitated a ‘new vision’? From a systemic perspective, this SPM marks the end of an era lasting more than seventeen years, an era in which ELET’s identity was nurtured by the umbilical chord that sustained its dependence on the core funder. This SPM signals the beginning of the organisation re-crafting its identity from that of a surrogate of the corporate funder to one that is urged by the funder to assume a corporate identity as a means of attaining self-reliance and self-sufficiency. The last instalment of grant funding (according to the funder’s official policy) would come to an end in 2001, with little hope of renewal. Although, the process of weaning ELET off this dependency was gradual, there is a sense that not all members of the organisation are adequately prepared for this transition. In this context, the SPM is perhaps reactive rather than proactive. Although it should appear ‘commonsensical’ amongst members of an NGO about what might be considered appropriate, if not inevitable strategic choices, there is dissent amongst members about how a shift from dependence to managerialism will impact in the developmental mission of the NGO. To understand this resistance it is perhaps necessary to examine the anti-managerial stance that typified the NGO historically. Eade, Hewitt, and Johnson (2002:3) provide an articulate explanation:



*Back in the 1960s and 1970s, when the development NGO sector was smaller, less competitive, and more voluntarist in nature, 'management' was often seen as a pejorative term; at best irrelevant, at worst incompatible with commitment...However, with the increased competition for public donations, and the rise in official assistance being channelled through them from the mid-1980s onwards, the NGO sector urgently felt the need to professionalise itself ... also to rethink their own raison d'être and direction.*

The above mirrors the trajectory, role and status of South African NGOs in the mid-eighties, a period characterised by greater liberalisation of the apartheid state, which resulted in substantial increases in foreign and corporate funding for NGOs. The funding, particularly from Scandinavian countries, the European Union and US Foundations, provided a substantial boost to the NGO sector, which experienced a phenomenal expansion in its capacity to act as an alternative social welfare delivery system (Habib & Taylor, 1999).

The sheer enormity of the sector, estimated at more than 98,000 in 1999, employing more than 650,000 workers<sup>45</sup>, necessitated the institution of a national regulatory framework to monitor the many private-for-profit institutions whose programmes were of dubious quality, amongst which were those institutions that existed for the enrichment of its members by parading as NGOs (see Habib & Taylor, 1999). Conceived originally as counter-hegemonic agents of resistance to the illegitimate state, the NGOs (or perhaps more appropriately - Anti Government Organisations – AGOs) of the nineties faced daunting new challenges and opportunities with the birth of the democratic state. The democratic state would henceforth have a significant impact on the capacity of the NGO to continue in ways to which they were accustomed. Although the NGO sector as a whole would eventually experience re-figurations of their identities in response to the state refiguring its own identity, the impact of the democratisation process was to have a significant impact on language education and training NGOs in particular as Eade, et al. argue.

*Corporatism, strategic planning, and formal accountability became the order of the day; a way to contain if not to understand the complex environments in which development and humanitarian programmes now had to function. Having discovered a particular brand of corporate management, however, many Northern NGOs and official development agencies began to seek spiritual and practical guidance not from within their own unique and multicultural experience, but from the orthodoxies of the for-profit sector (Powell & Seddon, 1997; Lewis, 1998). Ironically, many observers and insiders feared that in nailing themselves so firmly to the mast of strategic planning and market-led approaches, NGOs risk casting their central values and accumulated wisdom -- their distinctiveness -- overboard*

(Eade, Hewitt, & Johnson, 2002:3).

An analysis of the discourses of the 4 key participants in this study reveals interesting contours and cleavages to what might be considered commonsense orthodoxies. The

<sup>45</sup> This estimate accounts for the Non Profit Sector in general, and includes a large number of less formal community based NPOs. See Swilling & Russel's (2001) "Size and Scope of the Non-profit Sector in SA" for what is perhaps the only comprehensive study on this sector undertaken in SA.

central focus of this section is an analysis of organisational discourse and how it is articulated by individuals working in NGO environments, as they construct and reconstruct material practices and their psychological identities. The essence of the argument is that, even if organisational members do not consciously embody the values of the organisation, they inevitably reproduce it through their agency. In other words, I adopt a social constructionist perspective that seeks to illustrate how individuals' discourse constitutes the identity of the organisation, just as their identities are simultaneously constituted by the discourse of the organisation. I will attempt this by providing empirical evidence of the processes and practices, which both reflect and construct that experience.

### 5.1.2 Managerialism Professionalism and the Ethical Divide

Mervin, the director, Cecil, a senior manager and Tracy, the programme manager, are all representative of the traditional NGO world which symbolises humanitarian values based on a strong developmental mission. Cecil's developmental ethic is lucidly articulated in the following transcript:

*If this [ELET] were a grocery shop, we would have closed it down a long time ago. But we are not a grocery shop. We offer teacher development courses. Our experience is that students may not pay up when we want the money, but in the end, just before graduation, they pay their dues. We've experienced financial crises before and we've bounced back. There is no reason to believe that we won't bounce back again.*

This discourse articulates the dilemma experienced by a development manager, capturing the tensions between development ideals and the realities of practice. Cecil subscribes to the belief that in order for the NGO to fulfil its developmental mission, it has to retain its humanitarian identity, which he believes is compromised by the adherence to a corporate rationality, which he suggests, both Teboho and Tracy advocate. The difference between Mervin in his capacity as director and Cecil is that Cecil has the luxury of dreaming lofty dreams without being unduly concerned with matters of fiscal austerity. Such matters, it would seem, fall exclusively within the province of Mervin, the director. Cecil languishes in the belief that there is some self-perpetuating, philanthropy that will ensure that ELET bounces back.

Teboho offers caution against this idealistic posturing. She does this with the benefit of hindsight (from her experiences with the NGO world) and foresight (from her involvement with the corporate world). She makes a conscious choice to infuse into the neo-NGO world, an agenda influenced by a corporate ethic, because she believes that ELET can no longer seek refuge in corporate handouts.

*...we need to abandon the spirit of entitlement (which some NGO's are guilty of) and adopt a spirit of entrepreneurship where every individual within the organisation adopts a corporate ethic and works to promote the interest of the whole organisation rather than individual interests.*

Interestingly, Teboho occupies a somewhat invidious position in her dual roles of development consultant to AngloVaal as well as chair of the ELET board. On the one hand, she has an obligation to maintain the social mission of the NGO, which implies resisting the coercive power of the corporate rationality that she symbolically represents.

On the other hand, she has an obligation to ensure the survival of an organisation, which finds itself struggling as a consequence of a changed, and ever changing development environment.

*It is really about exercising a few basic business principles: prune what you don't need, acknowledge that there are limitations to what you are able to handle and temper your dreams with the reality that to survive, NGO's will increasingly have to operate on the same principles as successful businesses.*

Although she consistently urges ELET to adopt the less insidious attributes of the corporate rationality, one is inclined to ask (at the risk of hatching another conspiracy theory) whether in fact Teboho has not acted in a 'sinister' way towards ELET by asking AV not to renew its funding grant as suggested in her comment:

*... and I could quite easily secure another three years of funding, but I have nothing to benefit from a disempowered ELET, and equally, I have nothing to benefit from a totally patronising AV.*

It would hardly be surprising if she did dissuade AV from renewing the grant, since she believes quite firmly in the principle of autonomy and sustainability of the organisation without the bondage to a donor. If one moves beyond applying polarities and dichotomies in attempting to analyse Teboho's motives, then one observes that she sees no fundamental dichotomy in the way the NGO conducts its affairs in relation to how the corporate world manages itself. In what is perhaps the most lucid articulation of pragmatism, Teboho declares:

*I think that it is important that we maintain dreamers like Cecil and it is perfectly reasonable that there will be people who will not be comfortable with the new rationality. We do need to keep the dreams alive, but with a consciousness of the reality we ultimately have to face. There were times when an organisation would fall into the crevice and some Good Samaritan would come along and rescue it. The days of organisations bouncing back because of good Samaritans are forever gone. These days organisations bounce back because they respond creatively and strategically to their predicaments. Today we no longer have the comfort of expecting a lifeline every time we are in trouble. We have to dream with the consciousness that at the end of the month we will have to pay the rent or face eviction. We cannot sit back smugly hoping that we will bounce back as we always have.*

A prudent question would be to ask why AngloVaal decided to sever its ties with the organisation it bore and nurtured for more than two decades. An obvious response would be that the climate of economic globalisation forced the corporate giant to reassess its philanthropic commitments. Is AngloVaal's response purely economic?

### **5.1.3 Corporate Donors: Good Samaritans or Strategic Charlatans?**

Since the level and direction of a company's giving are largely determined by its overall concept of socially responsible behaviour, its philanthropy cannot be understood apart from it. However, Levy and Shatto's study (1980, cited in Powell, 1987), found that the percentage of a corporation's gross income contributed to non-profit organisations is strongly correlated with the company's advertising and customer service expenditure. Since advertising and customer service are not alternative forms of charity, it may be concluded that charity is, in part, an extension of advertising and customer relations. A

more cynical view would interpret AngloVaal motives as an attempt to use ELET as a conduit for social conscience money (a common characteristic of corporate business in the apartheid era), as suggested by Teboho:

*There was a space for the NGO movement that could play a dual role by leading the struggle, while at the same time, providing developmental leadership. I'm not sure whether these two components are in fact separate, or part of the same continuum. The NGO movement played a key role as an alternative and as a conduit for donor funding and resources (both local and international) that were directed at development.*

However, this generic categorization does not seem hold true for the founding family of ELET, at least not in the face of it. The AngloVaal group was responsible for philanthropy to a range of beneficiaries, including the Urban Foundation, which it helped initiate as mechanisms for black empowerment. The fact that the director of AngloVaal sat as chair of the ELET board of trustees invites several layers of interpretation and speculation. There is some evidence that the group's founding director had a genuine belief in the power and potential of language for economic empowerment.

While it is true that large companies are predisposed to making large contributions in furtherance of company profits, these are merely predisposing conditions and are sometimes interceded by the attitudes and actions of senior management. This is evident in the shift in attitudes to ELET as the AngloVaal management is passed on to succeeding generations of family members. Notable in the general shift in attitudes is a change in attitudes to philanthropy, manifest in changing attitudes to language development as a means of social reconstruction. This is mediated by the fact that the period of management transfer from senior to junior coincided with the period of national and international economic developments as a consequence of globalising influences on local economies, resulting in unbundling and dispersal of donor aid. The shift in attitudes is justified as an attempt at freeing ELET from the shackles of dependency, a position steadfastly pursued by Teboho as chair of the ELET board.

Teboho's clarity of focus derives from her intimate acquaintance with the NGO world of yesteryear and an equally intimate acquaintance with the corporate world she now represents. She is cognisant of the benefits to be derived from adopting the language of the corporate world. In that sense, her intention may not be insidious, but strategic, a consequence of her belief that the NGO world is caught in something of a time warp:

*In the post 1994 era, I don't think the issue is whether they are relevant...It is about everyone, the NGOs included, recognising the need for a changed and changing role. Where we have failed as the NGO movement is interpreting what its new role is. For many years, NGOs were THE alternative, to a point that the alternative became the mainstream. People entrench themselves into a particular system and when circumstances change and there is a need to shift into the real mainstream, whatever that mainstream is, there is resistance. People who have been in the alternative, who now have to find a new role, tend to struggle with making that shift. It would appear to me that because NGOs were central to the whole development agenda in this country, they **expect** that the mainstream should come to them, rather than their joining the mainstream. Now we face a situation where funders and donors regard the democratic government as*



*legitimate (whether it actually delivers or not) and find it more appropriate and proper to work with the government directly rather through the NGO movement.*

Tracy, by comparison, with a relatively limited exposure to the NGO world, endorses the need to bring the agenda of the traditional NGO into dialogue with the agenda of the neo-NGO for the survival of the NGO. She does not consider it anomalous to infuse the rationality of the corporate into the NGO world as long as the social goals pursued are clearly defined. Like Teboho, she believes that the NGO should not carry the baggage of ELET's historical roots into the new order simply because of its success in a bygone era.

*We must remember that we are operating in a very different context now. We have witnessed a dramatic shift in the funding scenario. Funders are no longer only funding NGOs; they're also funding consultancies, non-profit organisations, universities, research units and others. So, on the one level we have to compete with them. They go in, wearing their smart business suits and gold earrings and woo funders with their PowerPoint presentations and funders are very impressed by that. Funders are more interested in giving work to people whom they know are going to get the job done rather than people who have a history of development work. There is certainly a culture of entitlement amongst NGOs, and I think ELET to some degree is guilty of this. Funders no longer respond to the 'cap in hand' approach. No longer can we go to a funder and say 'We're an NGO, we have a social responsibility focus, and therefore you must just give us money because we deserve it... Look at the work we have we've done for the last 15 years, so please give us some money so we don't collapse'. Funders are not interested in giving money just because the NGO has a good track record. That's what used to happen. Now, NGOs have to respond to competition and a results orientated development environment. Therefore, cultivating a positive image and marketing an organisation aggressively is vital. Funders are favourably disposed to an NGO which has a social bottom line, but which acts like a business.*

There is a significant consonance between Tracy's discourses here and Teboho's throughout the narrative. This does not suggest that they are blindly compliant in their advocacy of the new corporate rationality (an issue I examine further in this chapter). Rather, the point I make here is that their conceptions of organisational 'structure' and identity is located in the business discourse despite their different disciplinary backgrounds (Tracy gave up a position in the private sector to join the NGO world: Teboho left the NGO world to join the corporate world).

*The days of funders offering generous handouts have changed. Funders have become very disillusioned by the number of NGOs that misappropriated funds or just didn't deliver. So now, their focus is to seek the best person or organisation for the job. They don't particularly care whether you're an NGO or whether you're a private company. And I don't think their approach is necessarily a bad thing, because I think there was a lot of fuzziness around the handout mentality and entitlement, which I don't think, does anybody any good in the long run. Let us accept the reality that the blanket funding NGOs once received is dead. But having said that, I don't think there has to be a contradiction between operating in a professional, competent and businesslike way with maintaining a humanitarian mission. This is not to say that business is always professional and competent, but I'm just linking the means to the end. The challenge for us involved in humanitarian work is to reach our social bottom line but not at the*

*expense of our financial bottom line. We're not missionaries out there waiting for the funders' god to deliver. It is a fact that we have to compete in an environment that's getting far more difficult, and I don't think by responding to competition, your essence is corrupted by it. It's just a different way of looking at how you work and how you see yourself in your work. Although we face frustrating blockages as we do with the PHASE project and US Aid, who puts enormous pressure on the quantitative side of what we do, I acknowledge that it is a lot more difficult to measure educational and social development, because you're not building bridges or houses. Social development is much harder to achieve, it takes much longer, it has to be more repetitive. It has to have a lot more follow-ups and it has to be sustainable. I'm not sure whether there are ways of measuring success but it's something that makes us more rigorous, more accountable and it lifts the profile of social development*

These discourses are in variance (not necessarily in the performative sense) with Mervin's development - managerial discourses. As director of the NGO, Mervin concedes the need for the professionalisation of the NGO, in as far as acknowledging its obligation to deliver high quality emancipatory teacher education programmes to support the reconstruction of education. However, he is reluctant to submit to a corporate - managerial mentality, which, he believes is in conflict with the spirit of the developmental enterprise and will necessarily undermine its humanitarian values. Mervin resists cooption into the corporate rationality, because of his philosophical and ideological kinship to language as a disciplinary mechanism for development. These competing discourses evidence the duality that characterises the lives of those struggling with the ambiguity surrounding their roles. An NGO in South Africa no longer has a clearly defined, developmentally focused function, but is a contested terrain, having to reconcile fundamental issues about professional identity while simultaneously redefining themselves pragmatically to ensure their relevance as a means to continued legitimacy. These competing discourses are debilitating for some, empowering for others, but collectively they constitute a vital ingredient to maintain a vigilant balance between pragmatism and managerialism, a balance that determined the survival of many NGOs in the post 1994 period.

#### **5.1.4 ELETs Survival: Providence or Persistence**

ELET's advent in the mid-eighties was a consequence of the relative vacuum in higher education in addressing the iniquitous teacher development provision for African teachers who, in the first instance, were either geographically or economically marginalised from intervention programmes and, in the second instance, were denied access to racially designated universities. (see Cloete, et al., 2002). During this period, the majority of Afrikaner universities were compliant with the racist policies because of the material benefits to be derived from their alliance with the apartheid state. The "English" universities, with less of an allegiance to the state, were more likely (overtly or covertly) to challenge racist admission policies. By 1994, the status quo in the higher education sector became untenable, prompting a plethora of policy review initiatives. Amongst the more significant for the teacher education sector was the National Teacher Education Audit (1995), which highlighted the gross inequities and excesses across the sector. This prompted the launch of a statutory body in the form of the South African Qualifications Authority, which would act as watchdog over the registration of service

providers, as well as monitor the quality of their services. One of the challenges SAQA faced was how to monitor non-formal institutions on the same terms as formal institutions in the absence of quality assurance mechanisms for the former.

The audit reinforced a growing concern amongst funders and corporate sponsors about who the real beneficiaries of the aid was. Among the NGO sectors that was perhaps the first to be excised from the funding pool was the English language development service providers, because they were not perceived to be providing a sufficiently compelling need in the new democratic state, relative to the new government's language policy agenda which was largely politically motivated, focussing on promoting multilingualism. More importantly, the credibility of NGOs, many of which existed as "employment agencies", came under scrutiny as the following excerpt from the Economist (January 29, 2000) poignantly captures:

*"An NGO man thrusts his crudely printed calling card at the visitor. After his name are printed three letters: NGO. "What do you do?" the visitor asks. "I have formed an NGO." "Yes, but what does it do?" "Whatever they want. I am waiting for some funds and then I will make a project."*

Consequently, the most consuming challenge for ELET, like many other NGOs in the country (highlighted at this SPM), is its deepening funding crisis, exacerbated by the systematic erosion of possible compensatory options for alternative sources of funding. For much of ELET's life as a development organisation, it was able to cushion the impact of diminishing finances through the core funding it received from AngloVaal. The core funding served as a safety net, enabling it to fulfil its development mission without having to be unduly preoccupied with fiscal constraints. For example, the financial security of the early years meant that it could afford to counter some of the typical impediments of Bantu education by entering individual school sites to institute professional development activities focussed on small groups. This micro-intervention strategy, although considerably more expensive than the cascade model<sup>46</sup> programmes, yielded significantly higher levels of sustainable and tangible development, as is evidenced in evaluation reports on ELET's teacher development programmes<sup>47</sup>.

Hence, the popularity of the organisation in its early history can be attributed in part to the relevance and pragmatic value of the service it had to offer. Language development was considered a prized commodity in the development field. The market for the product was already created by years of unequal statutory language policies. The mission facing the NGO was simple: provide language professional development as a means of linguistic empowerment that would lead to skills development and expedite the inevitable incorporation of the marginalized black population into the economy. ELET responded by instituting a programme that Mervin describes as:

*...a combination between what we called needs driven and supply driven. We had what we thought were skills that we could offer, and tried to match this with the actual need in schools. On the basis of this, principals would decide whether*

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<sup>46</sup> A mass-based development strategy popular amongst foreign donors which involves a hierarchical training of bureaucrats, who in turn train trainers, who in turn "cascade" the training to end-users. This model has consistently been criticized as ineffectual, particularly because of the reductionism that occurs at each successive tier of training.

*they wanted to be part of the programme. We avoided conscripting schools. We recruited them on the basis of what we could offer them and they stayed on, on a voluntary basis.*

The relative success of ELET's intervention programme can be ascribed, in the first instance, to the voluntary participation of schools, which meant that schools had a considerable moral investment in the programme, and therefore had an obligation to make it work. Secondly, the programme represented a tangible attempt at Whole School Development, which was potentially more sustainable than the once-off, large-scale interventions funded by international donors that would later become the norm:

*We focussed on elements of the curriculum, such as devising a business plan, instituting a departmental policy, and going back to the basic ingredients of accountability such as drawing up schemes of work, maintaining appropriate recording of progress and forming subject associations with other schools. The ultimate goal is to enable schools to begin developing their own school based INSET. We realised that teachers are not always deficient in terms of methodology. We discovered that the problem is that they often operate in a context that is not always supportive.*

An independent evaluator had this to say about ELETs intervention programmes:

*Where ELET is making a significant impact is on the classroom methodology. The overall approach of the organisation to teachers, not as passive recipients, but as collaborators responsible for their own learning, is clearly working through into the classroom. . .*  
(Kartshorne, 1984)

When it became apparent from reducing donor funding that the luxury of micro-intervention could not be sustained, ELET expanded its intervention to larger sites. Eventually it evolved these interventions into teacher development programmes and later to formally accredited courses. This strategic response to the changing environmental forces in teacher education enabled it to make the transition to being a provider of 'massified' programme offerings, which later became the norm in teacher development. The certificate (COTE) and diploma (DOTE) and later the (CEMT) and (PETRA) in-service courses were highly acclaimed by students, universities, and funders. The courses filled a crucial need, especially in the context of the absence of skills amongst educators to manage the emergent multi-cultural and multi-lingual classrooms. However, this strategic response met with a new set of official policy challenges that would significantly influence the identity of ELET, undermining its capacity as an agency for teacher professional development, necessitating strategic modulations to its programmes and curriculum.

Despite the decline in demand for the courses, (possibly because accreditation was de-linked from salaries), as well as the relatively high costs in running them, ELET tenaciously held on to them. This happened in a context of declining core funding from AngloVaal, together with accumulated deficits from running the courses. Why did ELET persist in offering these expensive, unprofitable courses? To understand this peculiar phenomenon, it is necessary to explore the identities of key individuals within the organisation, notably that of the director and his role in crafting the identity of ELET.



### 5.1.5 Counting the Costs: ELET as the counter hegemonic force

*Michael Foucault reminds us that discursive environments set the conditions of possibility for the reconstruction of troubled (and untroubled) selves...our ability to choose between options-to use some options in order to resist others, or to construct new ones-can be as liberating as it is overwhelming and debilitating*  
(Gubrium & Holstein, 2001:13).

Mervin's professional identity, rooted in a strong cosmopolitan colonial influence, was shaped by his exposure to a fledgling post-colonial education environment in Zambia in the early nineteen sixties, which sought to grow a "local" curriculum carved out of a colonial tradition. Mervin's decision to go into exile in Zambia was prompted by several considerations. First, it was pragmatic; an attempt to escape the racist service conditions black teachers had to endure under Bantu education. Second, he wanted to be part of the experience of post-colonial independence and the challenges it offered. Third, he wanted to escape the oppressive and debilitating tradition of fundamental pedagogics, which was one of the pillars of the South African apartheid state.

*When I left SA for Zambia, I was very naïve and felt something of a missionary, going to save the people. I had this perception that South Africa had a level of academic sophistication and therefore the answers. When I got to Zambia and met with different practitioners with brilliant new ideas, I realised how inadequate my experiences in SA had been. When I returned to SA in around 1976, just after my father had died, I was even more aware of my deficiencies in dealing with an oppressive environment. You are not aware of the colonial influence whilst you are part of it. It's something that dawns on you in hindsight.*

His interaction with accomplished linguists such as Rod Ellis and Brian Tomlinson, together with his exposure to a variety of foreign nationals who sought refuge in Zambia, provided Mervin with a rich academic platform to conceive of an alternative pedagogy to the dominant fundamental pedagogics:

*...these individuals had refreshing ideas; quite distinct from those I was exposed to in SA. In many ways, these ideas were inspiring and illuminating for me, allowing me to shape my identity as a language teacher educator. There were interesting ways in which we went about engaging with innovative approaches to pre-service teacher education. The British influence was strong, but what allowed for creative development was that there wasn't a pre-existent tradition of teacher education in Zambia. The preparation of secondary school teachers was a relatively new experience for Zambians and we were given our space to create our own curriculum.*

With the benefit of a range of experiences as schoolteacher, college lecturer and subject inspector, Mervin harnessed a range of skills in curriculum development and teaching methods, which shaped the form and character of the earlier ELET courses. His eclectic background enabled him to introduce a stronger pragmatic-sociolinguistic focus at a time when the mainstream language curriculum in South Africa was still entrenched in the orthodox colonial tradition, focussing on form rather than content, accuracy rather than fluency. The curriculum design of ELET's teacher development courses was intended to

achieve a balance between content and form, while introducing a critical literacy dimension. This aspect will be explored in greater depth in section B of this chapter.

### 5.1.6 Resisting Dilution and Reductionism

Over the following two decades, Mervin's academic vision and language pedagogy gave ELET's courses an emancipatory agenda, enabling it to pioneer intervention programmes, which pre-empted the state's aggressive curriculum reform initiatives of the mid-nineties, culminating in the controversial Curriculum 2005, which is underpinned by outcomes based education. Mervin's disillusionment with the curriculum 'reconstruction' process is borne out of his belief that in an attempt to unshackle itself from its colonial heritage, the English language curriculum has undergone a process of dilution and reductionism. Under the curriculum 2005 framework, he argues that it is difficult to distinguish between the English Language class, the Social Studies class, and the Life Orientation class<sup>48</sup>. The English Language class, he adds, seems to have relegated language proficiency and the acquisition of higher order linguistic competence in favour of a rather generic Life Skills development. The consequence is that a learner is doubly disadvantaged: on the one hand, learners lack proficiency in the mother tongue because the language of teaching and learning in the majority of contexts is English, which is chosen for its perceived capacity to yield social and economic benefits. On the other hand, the linguistic reductionism under the banner of C2005 and OBE means that learners are inheriting a deficient linguistic variety, which emphasises communicative competence (narrowly defined as oral competence) at the expense of pragmatic competence. Under the banner of communicative competence, the development of language skills is no longer valued.

Mervin's tenacious hold on the teacher development courses, despite the fact that they are under subscribed and unprofitable is motivated by his desire to provide some direction 'in a sea of darkness.' *It is better to light one small candle in one dark corner, than to curse the darkness.*"

ELET's teacher development courses were designed using the theoretical principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) (This construct will be explored in greater depth in section B). Mervin explains that this approach focuses on "*improving performance in other content specific subjects by making teachers more language-sensitive in their teaching*".

The courses were designed on the principle that: "*all teachers, not just English teachers, need skills to unpack discipline specific concepts, which are wrapped in language that is inaccessible*".

For Mervin, the new curriculum for Language Literacy and Communication represents an extreme slide from the deficient apartheid official curriculum to a new "liberalised" hidden curriculum (founded ostensibly on an emancipatory ideology). The policy, which calls for liberalisation of the new language curriculum, is neatly packaged in the language of reconstruction and social justice, giving the LLC curriculum what Mervin

<sup>48</sup> Curriculum 2005 substitutes eight inter-disciplinary Learning Areas for the traditional discrete content-laden subject disciplines. Social studies, Life Orientation., Language Literacy and Communication, Economic and Management Sciences, Mathematical Literacy and Numeracy, Natural Sciences, Critics of C2005 argue that there is insufficient focus on content in the new curriculum.

calls “a warm fuzzy feeling”, legitimising a *laissez-faire* language classroom where little language development takes place. As one who has strongly advocated communicative language teaching as an alternative to the structuralist approaches, Mervin feels compelled to halt the slide towards a neo-colonial linguisticism. Consequently, even though the language development courses are a drain on the financial resources of ELET, Mervin chooses to cross-subsidise them from other projects in the hope that the value and potential of the courses will soon be acknowledged by funders, particularly the potential of the courses to address the danger of:

*... the language learning process degenerating into a facile indulgence. This happens when oral competence and fluency is emphasised regardless of content and form. On that level, fluency is emphasised at the expense of substance, and the rigour of form is neglected. It also leads to a degeneration of the communicative process, when structures are ignored and there is no progression from a simplistic interchange through the oral process to something more substantial. In this context, CLT is oversimplified to mean oral communication at the expense of developing other productive and cognitive skills. So what you get as a consequence is children speaking confidently and competently but saying little that has any substance.*

This critique of curriculum 2005, is perhaps overly strident, and ignores the dilemma the state face in its compelling need to shift the South African education discourse from its structural/functional grammar teaching roots to a discourse that favours an agenda that creates a critical citizenry through the medium of language teaching. C2005, seen in this context reflects a more ideological political campaign for a socially responsive curriculum. While it is unlikely that the intention of C2005 to overtly to promote “linguicism”, the status of the language (as perceived by many Africans) as the lingua-franca of the world, will by default, accord linguist status to African languages.

Mervin acknowledges that expecting funders to change their funding agendas to accommodate the visions of ELET is a lofty expectation, since the changing imperatives of international funders has resulted in a diminution of support for language development initiatives anyway. At one stage in the funding landscape, it was fashionable for agencies such as the British Council (later DFID) and the United States Information Services to pour money into English language development for geopolitical motives. With the increasing anti-imperialist sentiment from Africa, British funders in particular, sought to shed the colonial baggage by redirecting funding away from language development to projects promoting Whole School Development and later to poverty alleviation.

To compound the marginalisation of NGOs like ELET, the state, with its fetish for ‘specialist’ consultants, prefers to commission ‘expert’ curriculum developers to design curriculum packages that NGOs are asked to deliver.<sup>49</sup> Hence, NGOs with their successful histories in curriculum development are marginalised, serving instead the role of curriculum functionaries.

*...we often have to compromise our principles, such as the case of the IMBEWU project. This was an Eastern Cape project, which was conceptualised by the*

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<sup>49</sup> Section C of this chapter will argue that organisations like ELET relegate themselves to the level of curriculum deliverers rather than curriculum developers because of the absence of a research culture in these organisations.

*Eastern Cape and technical advisors, appointed by the funder. All they want NGOs to do was provide a prescribed service in certain areas such as train teachers using materials modules that were not prepared by us. Quite a lot of projects are becoming like that now, where we no longer have field workers working in an area with teachers, we just have to deliver. They use the word "deliverables". You deliver a number of workshops, you deliver a number of school support visits and you leave. You have certain time frames and time lines and accountability, and log frames and logjams and a series of bureaucratic and technical requirements. We have to abandon the old style of operation where you had an ELET fieldworker working with about 10 or 15 schools with certain individuals over time, and building up relationships, working together. These in my mind were much more effective than just jetting in, jetting out, the consultant model of operation.*

Consequently, the fundamental aspects of language skills development are being neglected under this new multidisciplinary framework, which does not value acquisition of language skills for proficiency. The effect of this, as suggested by critic and journalist, Stephen Mulholland, is that South Africa is going to inherit a "generation of confident illiterates" where linguistic deficiency is compounded: the gap between those who are linguistically 'privileged' and those who are not is widened, reinforcing the power differentials. It is precisely this social development mission that Mervin has pursued in his professional life, and is now reluctant to abandon.

Mervin is by no means a lone missionary, fighting the cause of the dispossessed. Cecil Fynn, Mervin's contemporary, feels equally passionate about transforming the "unloved school". As the co-architect of the "Cambridge Courses"<sup>50</sup>, Cecil too, feels a sense of attachment to them. Over the years, he was able to infuse a reconceptualised notion of literacy through "The School Greening Project", which literally involves cultivating a fertile learning environment, by introducing fauna into barren school environments. This forms the basis for language and literacy development, using poetry and other literary works. Cecil's background in language and literature enables him to conceive of language development in creative and contextually specific ways. Cecil, the self-confessed dreamer, is less concerned with financial viability of the courses than with the need to develop healthy sites of learning and teaching. Together with Mervin and Cecil, the majority of staff, both permanent and part time, have academic backgrounds, usually in the field of linguistics, which predispose them towards the language development courses that they were co-responsible for evolving over the years.

### 5.1.7 Of Surrogates and Subsidiaries

Although Teboho believes in the inherent value of language development, as a necessary component to skills development, she does not share ELET's emotional attachment to the unprofitable courses:

*...can I afford to continue keeping the item on my shelf if no one is buying it? I'm sorry if that sounds like a tough line, but if people are not paying for the courses, then ELET must make some tough decisions about the courses. Each one of us*

<sup>50</sup> ELET designed a series of certificate and diploma language development courses modeled on the University of Cambridge's TEFL & TESL courses. The CELT, CEMT, COTE & DOTE were some of the courses offered by ELET which were accredited by the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate.



*here, and not just the managers, should be wearing a marketing hat, to promote the services we offer. If we still are not able to sell what we have to offer, we must stop selling it. If the courses are not profitable, we must discontinue them.*

Teboho believes that this hanging on to failed programmes represents a fundamental inability of ELET's management to make the transition from a surrogate of AngloVaal to an autonomous organisation. She argues that as a subsidiary of AngloVaal, ELET in the earlier years was under no obligation to operate on business principles and there was little need to seek additional funding.

*ELET would sporadically find work and earn an income from it, but if there was no additional income, it would be of no consequence. At that stage, offering the Language courses was the only work that ELET did, and that too did not attract any income since the courses were offered free of charge.*

While acknowledging ELET's progress towards autonomy, Teboho suggests that it is this dependency syndrome that has resulted in certain individuals within the organisation having an insular approach to development:

*despite the fact that some of the individuals in ELET have failed to make the necessary mind shift in terms of its dependency on AV, ELET has made remarkably rapid progress towards autonomy. Previously, ELET was reluctant to consider accepting government projects, perhaps because it did not fully conceive itself as a service-provider. Even as other NGOs were capitalising on the opportunities offered by the emerging Departments of Education, ELET was under no compulsion to move out of its comfort zone. The fact that it has been able to move out of its comfort zone is a giant leap for ELET. This is an achievement that needs to be celebrated and supported and nudged further, with the acknowledgement that ELET will never become fully self-sufficient. It is an NGO and NGOs by definition are not in a position to achieve self-sustaining profitability.*

While Teboho's views on organisational development are distinctly corporatist, (as will be evident in later discussions) she raises an important caveat here by suggesting that NGOs are not in a position to achieve self-sustainability. This raises essential questions about the continuing role and identity of an NGO, in particular, its ability to balance the demand for corporatisation while pursuing a social development mission and whether in fact, the two are patently anomalous. I will return to explore this aspect in chapter 6.

### **5.1.8. Concluding Comments**

I have explored a range of crucial issues in this section. Using the lens of organisation as discourse, I have zoomed into ELET's strategic planning meeting where individuals' agendas, lay ontologies and philosophical orientations, sometimes consensual, often contestational, get mapped onto the organisation's life, giving shape and form to the organisation. I have alluded to subtle attempts by members within ELET to resist shifting the organisation from the role of philanthropist to a corporate animal. Herein we also witnessed the conflict between pragmatism and idealism, and the necessity to accommodate a balance of both in a development NGO. I tempered my cynicism of the corporate funder's agenda by entertaining the possibility of its harbouring noble motives in sponsoring an NGO as a counter-hegemonic force. However, despite the erosion of ELET as just such a force, I have indicated how individuals within ELET resist dilution

and reductionism of the organisation's mission. We are made to realise that the archetypical image of the NGO of yesteryear, with its abundant funding from 'corporates with a conscience', is firmly part of the country's history, and hankering after it will not assist the organisation's necessary mutation for survival. Finally, we are reminded by Teboho, the chair of ELET's board, that while the organisation should avoid emotional attachments to unprofitable programmes, NGOs by definition should not expect to achieve self-sustainability.

In the following section, I explore the complex and confounding relationship between the NGO, the higher education sector and the 'democratic state', examining how the emerging higher education policy process has etched its imprint on ELET's identity. Before I do, I want to allude briefly to the framework of "embedded organisational identities" proposed by Meyer and Rowan, (1977) and DiMaggio and Powell, (1983) to understand the marginalisation of ELET from the higher education sector.

## Section B

### 5.2 Higher Education, the 'state' and the NGO: an Unholy Alliance?

#### 5.2.1 Embedded Organisational Identities

Embeddedness in organisational theory is regarded as a mechanism of legitimacy. Embeddedness is pursued aggressively by an organisation, as its legitimacy is contingent upon the degree of its conformity to normative models that enjoy historical legitimacy. Embeddedness derives from the material practices and symbolic constructions that organisations routinely imbibe from the organisational field and exhibit in their practices. ELET's embeddedness in the organisational field may be attributed to its legitimacy in the development arena accumulated through several years as an agency for alternative curriculum development, a role acknowledged by evaluators (see Hartshorne, 1984; Evans, 1996) as well as higher education institutions. Since the mid-eighties ELET's programmes and materials were used in teacher education units at universities in several provinces in the country. However, apart from these evaluation reports, there is little documented evidence to attest to ELET's contribution to the field of language development. While this component of ELET's life falls outside the scope of this study, an evaluation of the organisation through the eyes of its graduates would constitute a fascinating study. Yet, despite this embeddedness, it was unable to resist the onslaught of entropic forces that eroded its survival potential. Why was this the case?

I want to submit two propositions in attempting to answer this question. The first relates to the new higher education policy movement, which "attempt[s] at aligning higher education with the logic of the market" (Jansen 2000:11). This instrumentalist push for the entrepreneurial university of necessity alienates its former ally, the NGO, and fails to acknowledge the crucial role of NGOs like ELET, which were the foot soldiers of alternative education reform and delivery in the pre-1994 struggles. The fetish with the neo-liberal universal language of efficiency and fiscal austerity (the language adopted by both policy engineers as well as universities themselves) means that the NGO agenda has fallen off the page, perhaps irrevocably, to the detriment of the HE and the NGO alike. The second proposition relates to the ideological construction of NGOs engaged in education development by the higher educator sector, which relegates them to the level of service providers and curriculum deliverers, entrenching their status as poor cousins of universities, prompting an exploitative relationship, which invariably benefits the university. This has implications for the value placed on the intellectual labour offered by ELET and its consequent impact on the organisations sustainability. But more significantly, the marginalisation of the NGO is likely to have consequences for the very poor who have limited access to higher education, a niche historically filled by the development NGO.

### 5.2.2 Higher Education Policy and the Marginalisation of NGOs

Arguably, one of the most decisive influences on ELET's capacity to survive the new decade is the Higher Education policy environment that seeks to regulate the higher education sector. Central to the democratisation of education provision in South Africa is the attempt to harmonise and rationalise the disparate iniquitous higher education sector to address discrepancies in participation levels (previously racially defined). A series of policy initiatives in higher education were launched since 1994, reflecting the changing imperatives of the new state, beginning with *NCHE Report (1996)*<sup>51</sup>; *The Education White Paper of 1997- A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education*<sup>52</sup>; *The Higher Education Act of 1997*<sup>53</sup>; *The National and Institutional Planning Framework for the Higher Education System, Department of Education, May 1997*.

The Higher Education Act of 1997 grants the Minister of Education power to incorporate colleges of education into the national public higher education system either as autonomous institutions or as sub-divisions of existing universities or Technikons. By 2000, declining enrolments in university faculties of education, rapid decline in college enrolments due to stringent quotas imposed by provinces and the rapid growth of the private education sector changed the teacher education profile significantly (see Jansen, 2001).

Despite the significant decline in university enrolments, there was a rapid growth of teacher education students enrolled in public-private partnerships for upgrading qualifications, including NGOs like ELET. This generated sizeable subsidy for some institutions while in many instances the role of the public higher education institution was no more than that of monitoring the quality of its satellite programmes from a distance, with minimal expenditure. This in turn gave the private provider the much-needed legitimacy as their students were awarded the more prestigious degree of the public higher education institution. This caused concern in the DOE, which subsequently placed a moratorium on funding any new such public-private partnerships (Reddy, 2002:112).

In the meantime, a parallel shift was taking place in the colleges of education. As a result of quotas imposed by the provincial education departments, there was a rapid decline in college enrolments from a high of 80 000 in 1994 to 15 000 in 2000. There was also a

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<sup>51</sup> This report makes reference to the importance of regional consortia in the planning process and rationalisation of programmes.

<sup>52</sup> The white paper is intended to "promote regional co-ordination and collaboration as part of the national plan to enhance articulation of programmes, mobility of learners between institutions, the sharing of resources, including scarce academic staff, library and information facilities. It is also intended to reduce programme duplication and overlap. The Ministry will provide incentives to encourage and facilitate regional planning and co-ordination". In the section on funding it explicitly states "Incentive funding will be available on a selective basis to support the costs involved in regional collaboration among institutions which aim to consolidate, merge, share or otherwise collectively improve the efficient use of their facilities and resources for training, teaching, research or community service."

<sup>53</sup> In terms of this Act, the "Minister may after consulting the Council on Higher Education (CHE) and by notice in the Gazette, merge two or more public higher education institutions into a single public higher education institution." (Section 23 (1).



serious concern about the quality and relevance of programmes on offer. Under these circumstances, the option of an autonomous college of education was not a viable one and their incorporation into universities or Technikons became inevitable (ibid.: 113). The irony in these developments was that the higher education sector was in competition with itself precisely at a time when there ought to have been unprecedented cooperation to exploit the advantages that institutional cooperation offered: namely, avoidance of duplication and wastages, increased efficiency and the improvement of standards of quality (see Jansen & Sayed, 2001:168). The other irony that Jansen and Sayed highlight is that despite the historical disadvantage experienced by Black universities, they were unable to muster moral arguments to rescue their dwindling fortunes, while historically White universities benefited from their decline. Given this volatile climate within the higher education sector, what hope was there for the NGO service providers, which in the first instance were ideologically constructed as the 'other' and were consequently in a far more vulnerable position?

Predictably, this plunged NGOs like ELET into crisis. While historically, NGOs like ELET enjoyed a symbiotic relationship with universities, they were now under threat from their counterparts. Ironically, this came at a time when the NCHE report argued that:

*...the old relations of academic insularity and institutional self-reliance would have to make way for recognition of the functional interdependence between multiple actors with a stake in higher education...commercial enterprises, parastatals, research and NGOs*  
(NCHE 1996:8).

The historical importance and relevance of their acknowledged<sup>54</sup> contribution to teacher development over the years was ignored, as the HE policy heralded the marginalisation of NGOs from the teacher development terrain. ELET, whose language teacher development programmes were appropriated by universities, found itself being relegated to an unequal partner in an increasingly competitive environment, where private universities, public universities, NGOs and other private service-providers of teacher development jostle for students from a small dwindling pool, unleashing hostile energies between them.

*We have difficulty in recruiting teachers because there's quite a huge competition out there and just about all universities are competing for the same group of students, which constitutes a really a small market. To compound the problem, some of the universities are fairly inexpensive because they have the advantage of massified programmes conducted on a large scale. Places like Rand Afrikaans University, University of Pretoria, Potchefstroom and Fort Hare are even offering bursaries to students, so we've lost a large number of prospective students because we cannot afford to compete on an equal footing with them. There are students who have a certain loyalty to ELET and want to carry on studying with us, but because now we don't get funding for our courses, we have to charge for it.*

(Mervin, Ch. 3)

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<sup>54</sup> See Hofmeyer, J., and Hall, G. (1996) *The National Teacher Education Audit: Synthesis Report*, South Africa, in which the contribution of NGO are said to supersede several of the private and public teacher development institutions.

The deterioration in the relationships between NGOs and the HE institutions is evident in the hostility between ELET and at least one of its former allies in the university sector, where 'accords' previously concluded on the basis of "good faith agreements" and handshakes were breached by the new exploitative tendencies of the more powerful counterparts, as they too were driven by the impulse for survival (see Vignettes 3: pp 28,29,30). However, while the survival impulse is certainly a compelling argument for self preservation, the breach of faith in this context can be attributed to a less sinister but equally malignant element: administrative and leadership incompetence which generated exclusionary bureaucratic barriers, barriers which NGOs do not have the resources to overcome. While this component of the data cannot be verified or authenticated, there is anecdotal evidence to suggest that the breach of contract was a product of the absence of continuity in management structures and the unwillingness of new managerial incumbents to honour agreements made by their predecessors. By virtue of its vulnerability, because of ELET's precarious financial position, legal challenges for breach of contract against the more "powerful" and more financially secure universities were abandoned, to the detriment of ELET, both in terms of its financial loss as well as its loss of reputation.

*We had negotiated the necessary terms at Vista and Vista had approved of the qualification. We have a letter from the Vice-Rector confirming that they approved the course, but unfortunately he is no longer there to honour the agreements. This affects 300 students who are anxious and this is not good for the image of ELET, which took us several years to cultivate. (Mervin ch. 3)*

The above has implications for the corporatisation that has come to characterise NGOs and the way they engage with the 'market'. One of the reasons cited for the relative success and efficiency of NGO development agencies (see the National Teacher Education Audit, 1996) is that they were not encumbered by the same bureaucratic and legalistic rituals typical of HE institutions. Leaner, more flexible and participatory management/ administrative structures allowed organisations to channel more of their resources to development rather than maintaining bureaucracies. In addition, agreements concluded on the basis of good faith and handshakes meant that the "professionalisation" of NGOs could be contained, by limiting the need for legal and administrative consultants. With NGOs like ELET having to work in an increasingly competitive environment, the professionalisation seems inevitable as NGOs are forced to institute buffers against unethical practices. The looming legal crisis between ELET and its erstwhile 'partner' Vista University, as a consequence of a breach of agreement on accreditation, is a case in point. While graduates are loyal to ELET, and would rather resolve the certification impasse amicably, hard-nosed attitudes by university managements give ELET little room to manoeuvre.

Perhaps the most devastating irony of the new institutional alignments is its impact on the plight of the 'poorest of the poor' in the country. Excluded historically from the HE sector for a myriad of reasons, notably the prohibitive costs and geographic isolation, aspiring students were serviced by NGOs, providing some degree of mobility for educators where none else existed. With the adoption of neo-liberal policies by universities, the exclusion of the poor is becoming increasingly irreversible, while access to alternative educational sites is systematically receding.

To compound the problem, the larger universities offering massified programmes through distance education via satellite campuses, are able to attract students by offering

a range of incentives to students, including bursaries. NGOs like ELET that have no direct access to these funds, are dependent on the crumbs that universities offer. Consequently, the role of the NGO in relation to the higher education institutions has been changed in fundamental ways. For instance, ELET has a history of producing acclaimed curriculum materials, which are used in several teacher development programmes around the country. However, remuneration for these materials is often disproportionate to their actual value and their cost of production. Moreover, once delivered, these materials become the property of the client with no prospect of royalties for ELET.

While NGOs are inclined to bemoan their exploitation at the hands of the more powerful HE institutions, their victim syndrome is often a consequence of their non-entrepreneurial spirit. This is equally true for ELET, which has a vast repository of high quality materials that could be profitably marketed. However, the absence of a marketing ethic in the organisation means that such opportunities, which could effectively subsidise the unprofitable teacher development courses, are not exploited, contributing to the organisation's financial crisis.

### 5.2.3 Teacher Development Courses: from Cornerstone to Black Hole

In aggregate, these policy and ideological shifts have had a devastating impact on ELET's teacher development wing. Once the cornerstone of its legitimacy, the teacher development courses now became what Tracy calls the "black holes" of ELET's capital. Tracy is critical here of the lack of judiciousness in managing an untenable situation that has been allowed to develop with the administration of the courses.

*We need to be able to look at projects that we are involved in and the finances that are available and anticipate what has to be paid and why money is being pumped into black holes. And if there's no money for bonuses, that's OK, but you need to tell people that beforehand, so they know... I think it's fine to take certain risks with projects, if you expect it will reap rewards from it in the future. But after how many years of sustained losses will it take for us to realise that we have been running our teacher development courses unprofitably and that they are just draining our resources? For years the teacher development courses have just been a black hole. My approach would be to give it a chance to get going and work on hope and optimism, as Mervin does. But, if after 3 or 4 years there is no tangible progress in terms of its self-sustainability, you have to actually say, 'No, this is not working'. Change or cut or do something, but you can't carry on pouring money into paying tutors, materials developers, support staff and in general paying fortunes to people who are doing work that does not generate income for the organisation. An added problem is that students aren't paying their fees (Tracy, ch. 3).*

Apart from the residual effect of the higher education policy shifts, there is another factor that is worthy of consideration. The diploma and certificate language development courses which provided financial and career mobility for teachers was popular until around 1995, when their popularity began to wane. This may be attributed to the controversial de-linking of salaries from qualifications. With no prospect of monetary reward, there was little motivation to enrol for these courses. Ironically, this came at a time when there was a dire need for skills development in language teaching, given the changing demographics in classrooms all around the country. Samuel (2001:1) describes

the controversial policy of de-linking salaries from qualifications as an example of how the teacher education policy was made to submit to the economic and fiscal agenda of the state rather than to pedagogic concerns.<sup>55</sup>

Significantly, the beginning of the demise of ELET's 'formal' accredited teacher development courses heralded another mutation in its identity and inspired the beginning of its newly conceptualised role in the development field. With this mutation came two important characteristics that would impact on its survival potential in later years. First, the organisation became more responsive to the contextual factors that mediated language learning (this will be explored in some depth in section B of this chapter), and second, the organisation began to assume a greater entrepreneurial ethic that would assist its evolution from its dependency on donor aid to project generated funding. I have argued elsewhere in this thesis that credit for urging the organisation to make this strategic, pragmatic shift should, to a large degree, go to its development consultant, Teboho.

I wish to devote the rest of this section to an exploration of the extent to which Teboho, in her dual roles as development consultant to AngloVaal, as well as chair of the ELET board of trustees, has played a significant role in shaping the organisation's emerging identity. Before I embark on an analysis of the impact of Teboho's strategic response, I wish to give some attention to the logic behind strategy as a management tool and how strategy as discursive practice embeds itself in organisational structure, as well as to understand how this in turn shapes an organisation's identity

#### 5.2.4 Strategy as a Discursive Practice: Symbolic or Agentic?

Strategic management and strategic planning, the new mantras of corporate organisations, are gradually infiltrating the boardrooms of non-profit organisations. To what extent is this true of ELET? Who are the protagonists of this new discourse? What is the impact of this discursive activity? Hardy, et al. (2000:3) argue that most versions of strategic management help to generate a conservative ideology centred on profit, managerial power and the reinforcement of existing capitalist relations.

*Strategy's widespread acceptance and association with organisational performance also advantage those groups associated with 'performance-related' activities; at the same time, others, such as accountants and human resource managers, strive to make themselves more 'strategic' by redefining their work as 'performance-related'* (ibid.: 3).

Within strategic discourse, 'privileged' individuals, chairpersons and senior managers possess higher stakes of 'legitimate' knowledge, which gives them a tacit mandate to speak and act for and sometimes against, while other actors remain unheard and invisible. When we conceptualise strategy as a discursive construction, can explore its political implications by asking whose ideas have currency and, consequently, observe issues of activity, performativity and connectivity in the enactment of strategy.

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<sup>55</sup> For an insightful analysis of the international teacher education, see Samuel's, "Teacher education as a Critical Discursive space" (2001). Samuel argues that the teacher education policy moves in the mid-nineties was fundamentally driven by GEAR, which sought to rationalize the cost of human resources (and material resources) to the state. The consequence of this was the hopelessly ineffectual teacher rationalization exercise to which teacher unions were complicit.



As a tool of modern-day management routines, the language of strategy enjoys a prominent status in most business enterprises as well as in state institutions and healthcare centres. In recent times, it has become a preoccupation in institutions of higher education as they reconfigure their identities to replicate successful corporate cultures. Strategy has been so successfully infused in business language that it is accepted as a determinant of success and failure: whether by having a good strategy, a bad strategy or no strategy (ibid.: 3). Used effectively, the rhetoric of strategy is known to have been used to galvanise organisations into gear for success (see Rip & Deuten, 2001)<sup>56</sup>. Although in this context, strategy is often seen as little more than the *management of meaning* and the *production of texts* that subliminally impinge on the consciousness of members of an organisation, strategy discourse is both socially constituted and socially constitutive as it produces objects of knowledge, social identities and relationships between people (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997, cited in Hardy, 2000).

Some organisational theorists regard discursive activity as fairly innocuous, as having no more than symbolic value. Others see it as an expression of agency, which has the power to achieve intended outcomes... outcomes that are themselves the product of multiple discourses. ELET's strategic planning meeting hinges on an important outcome that has come to characterise development organisations internationally - the increasing necessity (a somewhat atypical tendency) for development organisations to engage in the language of economics. I suggest that this is atypical because the archetypical image of an NGO is one that operates in a triangular space between civil society, state and the markets. NGOs act as representatives of civil society, safeguarding the interests of the most vulnerable members of society whose interests are served neither by the state nor the markets. But there are always pressures on NGOs "to move away from the civil society vertex (grassroots) and towards the state vertex (co-option) or the market vertex (commercialisation)" (Cameron, 2000:6). Cameron argues that a New Institutional Economics perspective regards NGOs as institutions with a potential role to play in transforming society, but vulnerable to co-option by the state into only quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisations (QUANGOs) and/or commercialisation into (hybrid) *de facto* market institutions as the two competing dominant institutional models. To what extent are these models reflected in ELET?

The pressure to mutate into an environmentally responsive organisation is the dominant discourse in ELET's present strategic planning meeting. A decline in the availability of sustainable resources to sustain the organisation is clearly a driving force in the push for ELET's transition to a more market driven organisation with a corporate ethic. Central to this transition is Teboho, representing AngloVaal as its development consultant. She has consistently used her influence as Chair of the Board of ELET to urge the organisation to adopt strategies synonymous with corporate business. An analysis of her discourses on strategy provides useful insights into strategy as a social and, in particular, a linguistic construction. Eccles and Nohria (1993: 88 cited in Hardy, 2000) consider strategy to be a particular kind of rhetoric that provides a 'common language used by people at all levels of an organisation in order to determine, justify, and give meaning to the constant stream of actions that the organisation comprises'.

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<sup>56</sup> See "Narrative Infrastructure in Product Creation Process" in which Rip argues that using the strategy of narrative infrastructure enables as well as constrains action just as narrative enables and constrains the characters involved.

### 5.2.5 Concluding Comments

This section has attempted to demonstrate that while ‘embedded organisational identities’ provide the mechanism for organisational legitimacy, the conditions that guaranteed the survival of a language development NGO in the past could no longer sustain the organisation in the future. In an attempt to rid itself of an iniquitous higher education, one of the unintended consequences of the state’s policy was that it engineered the HE policy to the detriment of NGOs like ELET. The inherent vulnerability of the NGO was compounded when it was forced into unequal competition with its former allies in the HE sector. Consequently, ELET’s teacher development programmes degenerated from ‘cornerstone to black hole’ because of its dwindling resources. This provided the impetus for a ‘push’ towards corporatisation of the organisation, driven largely by Teboho, supported by others weary of deficits and uncertainty, achieved by employing the power of strategy as discursive practice, infusing the organisation with a new corporate common sense. What are the implications of this new common sense?

While it is apparent that individuals within the organisation share this ‘common language’, they derive different meanings from it. For example, Tracy’s discourses are consonant with those of Teboho on fundamental issues of systemic reorientation and strategy. Both Teboho and Tracy submit arguments, which few individuals within the organisation can convincingly dispute. However, while both Teboho and Tracy argue for a more robust corporatist and managerialist organisation, Tracy simultaneously expresses a strong desire for disengagement from an organisation whose identity she helped shape, but which no longer gives her the kind of certainty and security she desires at this stage in her life. As I analyse Tracy’s discourses in the section that follows, I will attempt to answer interesting questions about a range of issues. I explore labour practices in an NGO and ask whether these are or should be consonant to those in other institutions. I examine the implications of job-longevity and ask whether the desire for certainty is incongruous with the mission of an NGO. I pose questions about the psycho-social identity of members of an NGO and whether they are or should be impervious to the anxieties of ‘lay’ members of civil society.

## Section C

### 5.3 Institutional Selves: Troubled Identities

#### 5.3.1. New Institutionalism, Uncertainty, and Resistance to Dissolution

To hazard answers to some of the confounding questions on institutional identity which New Institutional economists are grappling with, it is perhaps necessary to understand the kind of animal the NGO is, and more importantly, to understand the psyche of those who work within it. NGOs are peculiar institutions in the sense that they frequently have mission statements that portray their roles as interventionist, impermanent, and as entities that would eventually be superseded by other institutions, grassroots and/or state and/or markets. In principle, (ideally) permanence should not be sought nor desired, since the desire for permanence will, of necessity, militate against effective intervention and delivery. Despite this burden of uncertainty, NGOs are regarded as the organisations most willing to challenge and change the distribution of uncertainty in favour of groups of people who “face disproportionate threats to their physical and psychological well-being, from forces beyond their control... reducing uncertainty and insecurity to secure a bottom line for poor people’s livelihoods is a necessary condition for their seeking their own-defined developmental gains with respect to both state and market institutions” (Cameron, 2000:9). Expressed differently, once the NGO has achieved its articulated development goals, it should die, and be reincarnated to pursue new developmental challenges.

In practice however, NGOs can, and do, become self-perpetuating. If the dissolution of uncertainty results in the dilution of the role of the development institution, then those personnel with secure contracts resist dissolution of the institution that has a potential to offer them security. For Cameron (2000:7), “the very creation of an NGO as an institution involves processes that will work against its dissolution”. The agitation for more clearly defined labour arrangements at ELET is in this context a natural response to uncertainty in an organisation with an increasingly uncertain future, in an economic climate that increasingly exploits this uncertainty. This dilemma is lucidly demonstrated by Tracy, who trained as a graphic designer and, driven by a developmental impulse, chose in the earlier years of her career to apply her aesthetic skills to materials design and curriculum development for NGOs. After this period in her professional career, in which she eventually submitted to the ‘law of diminishing returns’, she decided to embrace a new challenge in development work - the Project for Health and Sanitation (PHASE). Despite the success of the project, even by Tracy’s own admission, the interviews with her reveal a progressive sense of disillusionment leading to the desire for disengagement from her career. There is an apparent contradiction in her desire for a greater sense of stability on the one hand, and her desire for disengagement on the other. To what can one attribute this existential dilemma and how can this be reconciled with the proposition that individuals within an organisation will resist dissolution?

I want to explore this question by focusing on two dominant strands that appears to characterise Tracy’s professional identity at this stage of her life. The first is the universal need for affirmation of one’s labour, either in the form of recognition within the institution, or evidence of the tangible impact of one’s endeavours. The other strand relates to the desire for some degree of permanence and security, particularly after a

prolonged period of impermanence and uncertainty. The purpose of this mode of analysis is not to provide a simplistic, clinical psycho-social interrogation of Tracy's personality type. That would surely be a futile exercise, since I have persistently argued elsewhere in this thesis against typologies and omnibus prototypes to represent identity. However, it is necessary to be mindful of Muchinsky's, (2000) argument that 'emotions in the workplace'<sup>57</sup> is one of the most neglected facets of organisational behaviour, despite the fact that it is a crucial dimension of understanding organisations. While an exploration of this crucial area falls outside the scope of this work, it is suffice to say here that although Tracy's desire for disengagement is in essence, ideological, I detect in her discourses an emotional response, a sense of disenchantment on two fronts. Firstly, she is part of an organisation that considers her work marginal although ironically, the marginal status is ascribed to a programme (PHASE), which is in practice, the mainstay of ELET's work, at least in terms of the income it generates for the organisation<sup>58</sup>. Secondly, the nature of development work (which is inherently alienating because of the slow...sometimes invisible pace of visible change) is further disillusioning when one is confronted by the instrumentalist and technicist way in which funders conceive of development.

### 5.3.2. The Need for Affirmation: The Desire for Disengagement.

Why is the PHASE programme, and by implication, Tracy, accorded marginal status? Firstly, despite its strong literacy focus, some members of the organisation see PHASE as a departure from the teacher development programmes that have typified ELET's work historically. Several members of ELET consider the organisation to be primarily a teacher development organisation and therefore consider 'projects' as subsidiary activities. Tracy claims that she would:

*...like it to go beyond the bottom line of how much is it worth, and for Mervin to say that he really believes in these projects and that he is going to become more familiar with them. I'd like to be listened to more often. I do need leadership and direction and for this reason I have been motivating for an additional trustee or for an advisory board of people who can support what I am doing. I suppose I would appreciate someone signalling me to a journal article or a conference to keep me informed, because as much as I have a passion for what I do, it is not really my field, and I've had to learn what I know, as I've come along.*

(Tracy, ch. 3)

In response, Mervin claims that he is:

*...beginning to conceive of ELET in this new paradigm, not as an English Language Institute, but one that plays a more developmental role within a broader developmental framework...*

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<sup>57</sup> Muchinsky addresses neglected topic in organizational behaviour: emotions in the workplace. She advances reasons for this neglect, and proposes that the workplace is a rich arena for the manifestation of human emotions, both positive and negative. She argues that an examination of emotions in the workplace has both a theoretical and practical appeal, and may serve to help bridge the scientist/practitioner gap. This has become an important component in feminist organisational research (see also, Remlinger, K., (1999) Widening the Lens of Language and Gender Research: Integrating Critical Discourse Analysis and Cultural Practice Theory, *Linguistik Online*, Vol.2 No. 1, 1999)

<sup>58</sup> At the time of data collection, the PHASE programme was one of ELET's highest sources of income.



he adds that he sees the ELET of the future as having three pillars:

*This first revolves around English and language issues; The second relates to health and other social issues, which includes the PHASE project, and life skills, HIV aids and allied health issues. The third pillar revolves around broader environmental issues, of which Cecil's indigenous tree planting is one.*

However, Tracy would argue that by according secondary status to PHASE, the director has conceived of it as the "other", and hence it does not enjoy the same degree of support from the management as the courses do.

*I am seen as the PHASE person, because I do not have the linguistic background and an insufficient handle on the issues, which might perhaps be correct. My feeling is that I have to fight to justify, not only my position, but also that of PHASE.*

Secondly, Tracy's sense of marginalisation is compounded by her own professional insecurity in that she believes that she does not have a linguistic background. Ironically, it may be argued that the PHASE programme is perhaps one of the more progressive embodiments of literacy conceived in this country, as will become apparent when I interrogate the programme in section B of this chapter. Foucault (1980, 1984) has persistently argued that there is no comfortable, secure, politically progressive, or enlightened haven outside of relations of power or within relations of power. Tracy's quest for autonomy resonates with this notion of the pervasive influence of power and is motivated by her belief that PHASE will continue to exist as the 'other' as long as the organisational status quo prevails.

*I suppose Mervin chooses to leave me alone because he feels more secure with the language courses, something he is more familiar with. So, while I do think that the PHASE programme is crucial in achieving the goals of rural development, it needs to move from the margins of ELET's activities to the centre. The difficulty for me is that as long as the programme is located in ELET, it will continue to remain on the margins. Perhaps if I launched my own unit within ELET, with some autonomy, and its own identity, things could be different. Another thing that needs to happen for strategic reasons is that the organisation needs to change its name. The "English" in ELET needs to change if we are to have a change in its identity.*

The issue of ELET's name is perhaps the most revealing indicator of an organisation grappling with its mutating identity. While there is consensus that the name of the organisation is inappropriate and even politically incorrect, there is significant discomfort with discarding what has grown to be a proven 'brand' which enjoys legitimacy in the institutional field. Mervin's views encapsulate the dilemma between emotional attachment and pragmatism:

*We have been talking about changing the name of ELET to reflect more accurately its new identity, but it is something that I am not quite comfortable with. However, I do think that if this is the direction ELET is moving in, and if our survival depends on it, then we need to metamorphose to survive.*

For Teboho, a change in name is an act of strategic compliance, symbolic of ELET's responsiveness to the inevitable changes that come with a society in transition:

*As an NGO, we cannot continue, in the next decade, to call ourselves an English Language institute. For me there have been two main challenges. There has been*

*the challenge of defining exactly where we locate ELET as a development agency as we move into the future. Without losing sight of our mission of language development, we need to continuously reinterpret and be responsive to changing realities. While we cannot be everything to everyone, we cannot fail to respond to the challenges of a society in transition.*

For Tracy, the change of name was a compromise, and, like most compromises:

*...we don't expect everyone to get overwhelmingly excited, but at least everyone can live with it. I understand the staff's reluctance to abandon the name "ELET". I have been getting quite stressed out over this identity thing and I decided to let go. I am not here to further my own goals, to feed my ego or to make my mark in indelible ink...*

### 5.3.3 Troubled Identities

Citing Hochschild, (1993), Gubrium and Holstein (2001) suggest that in a world where feelings are commodified, and the management of emotions is rife, the "true self is overrun by false selves that have been mobilised to ward off these demands in social life" (p. 5). They add that when extraneous interests inundate the self, it retreats inward, "leaving only false personas directed towards others" (p.5). In this way, the 'personal self' preserves itself, allowing the 'false self' to be appropriated in service to others. This serves as a buffer between external demands and the inner self that may be in conflict with such demands. In the context of an organisation that imposes a multitude of conflicting demands on a manager, the 'false self' is a necessary prop to preserve one's true self while simultaneously preserving civil relationships. This is lucidly demonstrated in Tracy's decision to "disinvest":

*The tone at management meetings and even in informal discussions was starting to become quite combative: that there was a winner and a loser. I realised that I was investing so much in the outcome of the process that there was a danger that if my proposition wasn't taken seriously, I was going to feel undervalued and undermined. It was then that I decided that it was time to disinvest.*

The unitary 'personal' self here is in conflict with the 'false' organisational self, requiring compromises to private aspirations. The personal and private are suppressed and subsumed under the dominant discourses of the organisation as the avoidance of conflict takes precedence over personal inclinations. Thus, the boundaries between public and private are increasingly blurred as the organisational identity increasingly colonizes all the spaces in the manager's life, diluting or confusing the manager's sense of self. One of the demands of occupying a management post in an NGO is that individuals are required to manage and manipulate emotions for instrumental reasons. This, more than any other influence, is the catalyst for burnout, estrangement from oneself and the ultimate desire for disengagement. This kind of "social engineering" (ibid.: 6) for organisational stability brings into question the employment practices at NGOs and has implications for whether an NGO should be an "organisation in perpetual motion" (Samuel, 2002)<sup>59</sup> or the "self renewing organisation" (Gardner, 1965) or

<sup>59</sup> Personal communication, September 02

whether it should bear the seeds of its own demise before institutionalization takes place. This issue will be taken up again in chapter 6.

Tracy is able to rationalise her own “troubled identity” (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001) by submerging her private discontent into her ‘institutional self’. While she deals with her own disillusionment philosophically, she finds it is less simple to placate other staff members who she manages, and who, she believes, have legitimate expectations:

*I think people are very demoralised, very, very demoralised and it is very difficult for me as a manager, I'm in the middle, you know. I have to report back to my staff and tell them: 'there's no bonuses, I don't know when bonuses are coming, there may not be any, be glad you've got a salary at least.' The problem is there's something wrong with the planning because everyone was told in December we would get bonuses, then suddenly it doesn't look like we will be getting them. You have to be looking at budgets and figures and projects all the time and say, 'Well, we probably won't be able to give bonuses this year', giving people adequate warning. But to actually tell them they're getting their bonus, it will be a few weeks late and then to start saying, 'Well maybe next month, maybe next month, maybe next month and if you resign, you won't get anything.' You can't do that to people.*

The image of “life is a ballroom dance” in *part 7* of the narrative aptly characterises Tracy’s response to conflict: “the need to be in tune with your partner(s)”; her compelling need to “work things out” rather than “transfer blame”. However, frequent breaches in contractual obligations and broken promises by management to staff members go against the grain of Tracy’s ‘personal self’. She can no longer subsume this conflict into the ‘institutional self’ as she finds the organisational behaviour patently dishonest. Moreover, while it is easier to compromise on ideological issues, issues of conditions of service and remuneration occupy quite a different realm of emotion. The definitive “*you can't do that to people*” is perhaps the most vocal indicator of her resistance to the status quo and a clear expression of her attitudes to labour practices. She invokes a “discourse of morality” (Spencer, 2001: 168) to preserve the essence of the ‘personal self’ as she finds the conflict irreconcilable.

This discussion has attempted a psycho-social analysis of Tracy’s role as a manager, to understand her desire for certainty and stability on the one hand and a desire for disengagement on the other. While the two emotions are apparently contradictory, they in fact derive from her belief that there is a need to fundamentally reconfigure the institutional arrangements at ELET, the absence of which prompts self-preservation by disengagement. In the following discussion, I explore the impact of an instrumentalist view of development work, which has come to characterise the way in which funders have come to conceive the terrain. Using selected discourses by Mervin, Tracy and Teboho, I attempt to evaluate the impact of this mindset on the psyche of development workers and the implications of how this has influenced the identity of the organisation.

### 5.3.4 Log-frames, Log-jams and all that Eval-talk

By virtue of its vulnerable position in relation to the Higher Education sector, ELET has always had to pioneer development programmes. It has had to be at the cutting edge of new development initiatives and knowledge production because its survival depended on



its ability to mutate. This mutation is aided by the intellectual capital of its management, who are required to submerge their own inclinations in favour of broader organisational goals. In this sense, the NGO is a litmus test of the ecological development environment. Like the animal that bears its young and then dies, NGOs like ELET, have been breeding grounds for initiatives that are often not acknowledged, but which nevertheless have shaped the field of INSET in the country. An evaluation of ELET's INSET programmes conducted in 1995 under the auspices of the "Improving Educational Quality Project (IEQ) in South Africa" generated the following conclusions:

1. All levels of ELET training were associated with enhanced instructional practices and learner participation in the use of materials by learners, grouping of learners and interaction among learners in groups, and critical and creative activities. These are the key areas that represent dramatic shifts from more "typical" teacher centred classrooms in South Africa. Teachers at each level of training were rated higher than teachers without.
2. Teachers who received more than two years of ELET training (Teachers with high levels of training) performed better than untrained teachers in the same variety of teaching methods and materials used.
3. Teachers who received more than two years of ELET training performed better than other training groups in questioning skills and getting learners to ask questions in class.

Source: "Improving Educational Quality Project (IEQ) in South Africa", 1995

Despite the favourable image portrayed above, one of the more debilitating realities of development work is that the indicators of progress are not always self-evident, neither are they readily manifest in behaviours and performance. This is compounded where the short life cycle of many of the massified intervention programmes (usually one to two years), seldom allows for meaningful reinforcement of the benefits accrued. Add to this the rigid funders' bureaucratic prescriptions for reporting and accountability, and there are the ingredients for a reinforcement of alienation from one's labour as the following transcript reveals:

*...we no longer have field workers working in an area with teachers, we just have to deliver. They use the word "deliverables". You deliver a number of workshops, you deliver a number of school support visits and you leave. You have certain time frames and time lines and accountability, and log frames and log jams and a series of bureaucratic and technical requirements. We have to abandon the old style of operation where you had an ELET fieldworker working with about 10 or 15 schools with certain individuals over time, and building up relationships, working together. These in my mind were much more effective than just jetting in, jetting out, the consultant model of operation. And because this can be done on a large-scale, funders prefer it. Quite a lot of the larger funders prefer bigger projects because they don't want to handle smaller projects - it involves too much micro-management - so they prefer having projects involving hundreds and hundreds of schools and they can give finance to some other agencies such as JET who have the capacity to feed them with the paperwork. They don't have to have a relationship with the service provider - it's all businesslike now. While there used to be a hand in hand relationship with your funder, that's gone away, because you don't have funders really, you just have people who pay for your services. (Mervin, ch. 3)*



Like Tracy, Mervin laments the slide towards instrumentalism that has come to characterise the development enterprise. Intervention is portrayed here as a soulless activity, devoid of humanism. This is in stark contrast to the values and principles of ELET's founding mission: to develop a close bond amongst schools and fieldworkers, to establish a relationship of mutual trust so that the development process could be sustained. With the "jetting-in, jetting-out" model of intervention, development is projected by the new wave of funders as symbolic rather than substantive, which Tracy finds is another source of de-motivation:

*Another demotivating factor is the limited one-year life cycle of the project. How much progress that is sustainable can you achieve in just one year? Typically, we would go into schools, support them for the duration of the year, and then disappear. We all feel uncomfortable with that arrangement, but that is what the funder wants. The contract lasts for a year and there is no further funding to sustain the project, although funders expected miraculous results after a year. The problem with that kind of expectation of delivery is that you only focus on superficial indicators which are easily discernible, whereas the real substantive indicators are much more subtle and require many more years to reveal themselves as change. Nevertheless, PHASE is a fairly rewarding programme and I still believe in its value.*

This raises further crucial issues about the political agenda of the international donor and what underpins its relationship with NGOs. The prominence of NGOs at the recent conference on sustainable development in South Africa (August 2000) has been seen by many as a potentially transformative force in promoting more equal, participative, and sustainable development. At the same time, NGOs have also been seen as co-opted by neo-liberalism, functioning in ways that maintain systemic inequality (see Klees, 1998). Furthermore, the short term "band – aid" interventions are unsustainable, and are therefore guaranteed to perpetuate systemic inequality. The demand for "miraculous results after a year" encourages the "focus on superficial indicators" which masks the real impact of interventions. Although programmes are rewarding for NGOs in the short term, the persistent absence of real, tangible, authentically measurable impact is likely to be debilitating, and alienating.

### 5.3.5 NGOs, What's in an Acronym?"

Yet, the demands for accountability and reporting are now more rigid and bureaucratic than they ever were. How can this anomaly be explained? The sudden swing towards the language of managerialism, has given prominence to questions about the effectiveness of NGOs. Does the demand for empiricist modes of reporting suggest that NGOs are in fact seen by donors as overrated? (see Edwards, 1998). In his critique of the modes of evaluating NGOs, Mark Ginsburg's article "NGOs: What's in an Acronym?" highlights some of the problems inherent in the characterization and evaluation of NGOs. He notes that the heterogeneity of NGOs, (in terms of sectors they serve, their scope, and their level and sources of funding), the varying theoretical approaches used to analyze NGOs, and different conceptions of democracy, often result in contradictory depiction of NGOs (see also, Khamsi, 1998, Klees and Ilon, 1998).

*Funders like to speak about partnerships. They would like to think of their grantees as their partners. But this is often PC speak and their actual approach is quite paternal....*

In terms of the validity of these criticisms, it is true that the NGO movement has enjoyed somewhat confusing, if not contradictory fortunes in recent times. Clarke (1998) alludes to the 'associational revolution', which has been triggered in the developing world. Najam (1998) refers to this phenomenon as 'NGOism', the apparent belief by organisations such as the World Bank and the IMF that NGOs will succeed where governments have failed. This celebration of NGOism is tempered by voices of caution who ask whether this new found enthusiasm with NGOs derives from genuine acknowledgement of their merits or whether it may in fact be ascribed to a belief that they have been "socialised into the establishment – the development industry" (ibid.: 307). A further contradiction is that while the NGO sector is lauded for its effectiveness, and more rather than less money is now available to this sector, donors are experiencing a certain "compassion fatigue" (ibid.: 307). Donors are becoming increasingly circumspect about who gets to spend their money, and how they spend it. Najam identifies three possible explanations for this. First, the end to the cold war has inspired new development agendas and policies. Secondly, there have been a host of new claimants to the funding purse. Thirdly, there has been an exponential increase in the numbers of NGOs in service.

Clarke (1998: 37) suggests that in the nineties there was "a neoliberal climate of disenchantment" with the state and, under pressure from member states, multilateral donors and their bilateral partners channelled increasing amounts of funding through Southern NGOs. Secondly, Clarke suggests that whereas governments were previously antipathetic to NGOs, the recession of the 1980s forced them to acknowledge the roles NGOs could play in socio-economic programmes. This has meant that donors have had to institute mechanisms for legitimate exclusion to 'manage' the strain on their funds. Consequently, words such as impact assessment, performance management and accountability have taken on a profound importance, giving birth to new mantras in the guise of 'quality assurance', 'performance indicators' and 'strategic planning'. This in turn has led to disenchantment amongst development workers who feel overwhelmed by the rigid controls as Tracy experiences:

*The process of reporting is extremely rigid and highly bureaucratic. You cannot change a single item in the grant agreement without going through the most laborious process. To me this is not being developmentally minded. When you draw up a budget, the budget is, at best, an educated guess about anticipated expenditure. That's all it can ever be. Invariably, some things will cost more, some will cost less.*

Power continues to be vested in the prevailing alliance of foreign aid "technocrats, transnational capitalists, and African elites which has effectively infiltrated nongovernmental social service organisations while still retaining control of a diminished state" (MacLure, 2000:5). The clearest evidence of this apparent co-optation of NGOs is their heavy reliance on bilateral and multilateral funding. MacLure suggests that the "Achilles heel" of the non-governmental development sector, its dependence on external financial support, has led not only to increased budgets and organisational growth, but as well to greater bureaucratization and professionalization (Hearn, 1998; Klees, 1998, in MacLure, 2000). NGOs are thus being transformed into development sub-contractors whose primary concerns are to fulfil the multiple objectives and accountability procedures of their diverse funders. Consequently, as programme manager, Tracy's energies are expended in satisfying technocrats rather than devoting them to managing quality learning:

*Over the past month, I spent so much time on what I regard as complete waste of time and energy simply to satisfy the extremely obsessive demands of USAID. All I asked for in a memo was to utilise unspent money to reinforce a project. This was additional money that became available as a result of the favourable Rand/Dollar exchange rate. I did not ask for more money or to change the original grant agreement. We had a whole day meeting over the issue and it took three drafts and more than a month for the approval to be signed. We also have to deal with funder's representatives who are patronising and insulting and we are forced to endure it. I suppose funders are under pressure to ensure that funds are not misappropriated but officials often create the impression that they are really powerful, and behave as though they are parting with their personal fortunes. Relating to them is a very stressful experience, and I sometimes feel my throat closing up with tension when I have to talk to them. I don't mind the rigorous demands from funders, but the USAID management style is very heavy handed, to point of becoming demoralising to grantees.*

From this rather damning indictment, it follows that that while NGOs like ELET have championed the language of participatory development, their progressive structures have rarely been matched by equivalent models of development from funders. The obvious danger here is that the funder's prescriptions for reporting may reorient accountability upward, away from the grassroots, supporters and staff, upwards towards donors. Without meaningful accountability to their beneficiaries, scaling-up could seriously distance NGOs from their clients as the following apprehension by Tracy reveals.

*There are times when I feel I'm not doing enough as manager. I'm not referring to management of the bureaucratic aspects of the programme – there's far too much of that in my opinion. I want to be able to refine the programme and add value to it. I want to take it beyond its weaknesses, particularly weaknesses in its implementation. I think I'd like to be able to have more of a presence, to be able to have more contact with trainers in districts. It is often frustrating when one has to deal with having to compromise your dreams of what you know you can achieve, to satisfy the unreasonable demands of the funder, who often has little knowledge of pragmatic realities one has to deal with.*

Ginsberg (1998) concurs that the reorientation of accountability away from the grassroots is a particular threat as it “turns members into customers”. The type of appraisal, monitoring and evaluation procedures insisted on by donors, especially their heavy reliance on “logical framework” approaches or their derivatives, may also distort the accountability by overemphasizing short-term quantitative targets and favouring hierarchical management structures - a “tendency to accountancy rather than accountability”. The competitive nature of contracting also fosters an orientation toward treating information as a public relations activity (i.e. releasing the good and hiding the bad) and this compromises transparency.

### **5. 3.6 Professionalisation or Corporatisation**

Since NGOs cater for mostly low-income populations, they cannot be expected to generate sufficient revenues from such groups to enjoy absolute autonomy. Consequently, there is high dependency by NGOs on bilateral agency support. This is particularly true of some sub-Saharan countries, which are reported to have dependency

rates exceeding 90 percent (van der Heijden, 1987: 111, in Stromquist, 1998). In many of these contexts, which are characterised by acute poverty, social movements emerge because of "learning incapacities" and structural lack of "responsiveness" by established institutions.<sup>60</sup> At the same time, NGO reliance on external support, forces them to "oscillate between actions based on ethical convictions, and a logic of efficacy, which leads them to submit to the influence of political actors" (ibid.: 3). The logic of efficacy often involves adopting a mode of 'professionalisation' prescribed by the funder, which is sometimes in conflict with the mode of professionalism adopted by the NGO.

In this section, I explore the relationship between NGOs, and political actors (both donor agencies and the state), analysing the implications of submitting to the funder's demand for professionalisation, particularly the implications of prescribed forms of accountability, which includes, but is not confined to empiricist methods of evaluation. I explore the tension between contesting modes of professionalisation as well as the nature of the ensuing power relations. Finally, I contemplate on whether NGOs *can* continue to operate outside the framework of professionalisation based on the corporate model, which demands very specific reporting protocols, accountability and evaluation procedures. Through an interrogation of the voices of Teboho, Tracy and Mervin, I analyse the competing discourses that illuminate the complexities of donor funding, NGO capacity and programme impact.

Most rational NGOs will find it difficult to dispute the demand for appropriate levels of accountability and transparency, particularly in the context of widespread corruption and maladministration of donor funds (see Edwards and Hulme, 1996). However, there is an increasingly vocal resistance to current monitoring and evaluation practices, which are widely felt to be damaging to genuine development efforts by NGOs (see Najam, 1998). Many critics feel that a 'report culture' has developed, in which the important focus is to measure and count 'activities completed', 'performance indicators met' and 'outputs achieved', rather than ask 'what difference does the programme or intervention make?'

Evaluation protocols are often patently self-defeating, as Tracy articulates in her reflections of an evaluation workshop on a health and sanitation project.

*Are these evaluation reports an honest authentic useful tool? We generate vast amounts of data for the funder that I find rather shallow. It's a game I don't enjoy playing".*

For Tracy, the funder's obsession with quantifying output results in:

*...receiving a barrage of so-called action projects that were not action projects at all. There was the 'hand washing action project'; the 'gardening action project'; the 'litter project' and so on. I suspect that in many of these schools, the teacher or principal would allocate a particular activity to a specific grade, and use this as a punitive measure against offenders.*

Tracy adds that there was no participatory development component in the projects, participatory development being a crucial component in addressing larger outcomes of

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<sup>60</sup> One of the most paralyzing impediments to effective social reform and service delivery in South Africa is the incapacity of provincial governments to disburse donor funding efficiently. Millions of Dollars are reportedly 'rolled over' annually because of bureaucratic ineptitude, often jeopardizing the chances for further funding.



literacy, and a range of social issues for sustainable rural development. Instead, in Tracy's opinion the project was counterproductive because:

*... children do not learn anything new. Teachers seem to encourage children how to clean toilets. I have a serious problem with getting children to be good toilet cleaners: this is not what the project is striving for. This was what the Bantu education system was about. We are not in the business of spawning a neo-apartheid by developing qualified toilet cleaners. It really fills me with horror that we are perpetuating this idea that children, especially girls, are being trained to be cleaners of other people's toilets*

The supreme irony in Tracy's astute observation is that the unintended consequence of the project was that it was reinforcing precisely the kinds of attitudes and behaviours the programme was attempting to change. The demand for empiricist modes of evaluation, justified by funders as a legitimate drive for 'professionalisation', is seen by NGOs as simply a matter of a lack of trust in their ability to regulate their own practices, a concern vindicated by the unethical practices of some NGOs. However, critics of these accounting practices are that they are not particularly effective at weeding out unethical practices, while at the same time they actually make it more difficult for good NGOs to work effectively. Are there other ways in which corruption and inefficiency can be tackled without turning good NGOs into just 'bean counters' and paper pushers? (see, Mawdsley et al., 2000; Stromquist, 1998) Tracy argues in the affirmative:

*If I were to do evaluations differently, I would use a much more honest approach. We generate far too much statistical data, which does not reveal authentic information. I think you can get much more reliable information from a focus group discussion with learners or teachers. You won't get a neat statistic that fits nicely into your project management plan for USAID, but at least it is a valid reflection of reality.*

An over-reliance on documentation rather than field-visits to appraise impact tends to reward good documentation rather than good work. Furthermore, the evaluation protocols are often so highly technical that it necessitates diverting essential funds to hire urban computer literate consultants who have a handle on evaluation 'buzzwords' rather than utilizing the services of locally committed people as the principle of participatory development requires. These 'foreign' consultants possess the appropriate language and skills, but are less aware of local conditions, and not highly motivated by the NGO's mission (see Mawdsley, 2000). Consequently, Tracy suggests, evaluators fail to ask the right questions and the emphasis falls on:

*...having action projects for the purpose of accumulating them, not for the inherent value of the process and their outcomes. We have to ask more relevant questions such as: Have the children engaged with this activity meaningfully? Has the teacher used it in the class as a theme, or as a programme? Have teachers developed through the projects? Have learners developed through their engagement? Is classroom practice improving? Those kinds of issues are the real reasons we are doing these projects. We're not doing this so that we can say; 'Ah, we had 370 action projects this year!'*

Many 'acquiescent' NGOs have no inclination to challenge the accepted wisdom, as their concern is principally with winning funding to sustain their organisation. The demands of institutional survival mean that although NGOs are resistant to donor demands,

assumptions and expectations, they do not articulate them because to do so would be to risk organisational survival. Occasionally, however, professionals like Tracy, who are resolute about their mission, respond ‘uncharacteristically’:

*... sometimes you have to take a step back and say, ‘No I don’t actually care, I want real action projects, not numbers. I would rather have 50 real action projects than 300 clean-ups.’ The clean-ups are good. They are important, in that it helps children take responsibility and feel pride in their environment, but they’re not action projects. It would be so easy for me to take all of these little clean-up activities and call them action projects, but I firmly believe that you just have to keep a clear and sincere perspective of what your mission is in development work... Having said that, I must emphasise that I fully endorse the need for rigorous, creative modes of evaluation for accountability, I’m just opposed to the highly technicist quantitative approaches that funders seem to favour over more meaningful qualitative approaches.*

For Teboho however, the issue of evaluations requires no debate. For her, the evaluative act is a necessary, practical and commonplace activity, integral to the work of an NGO.

*To rate ELET’s success depends on how one defines success. I suppose I could, based on my own conceptions of success, generate at least ten descriptors of success. Let’s focus on three of them. If we say that ELET’s success is determined by its delivery in terms of the effectiveness of its programmes, then we need to be able to say, for example, that in the year 2001 we have conducted 25 workshops and that there is a tangible improvement in the quality of the teachers we train. Although I am chair of ELET, I’m not yet in a position to sing praises about the quality of its programme offerings because we have no empirical evidence of this yet.*

Practical and commonplace activities are “phenomena in their own right” (Garfinkel, 1967). These routine practices are “methods for making those same activities visibly rational and reportable for all practical purposes, i.e. accountable, as organisations of commonplace activities” (Garfinkel: pvii, in Cabraal, 1998: 6). In Garfinkel’s perspective, practical actions, whereby members produce and manage settings of organised everyday affairs, are identical with members’ procedures for making those settings accountable. For Teboho, accountability means that practices should be observable and reportable, “as situated practices of looking and telling” (ibid.: 6). In this view, action is desirable if it is accountable. If it is accountable, it is intelligible. It is also describable, predictable and analysable, is constitutive of people’s practical actions, and consequently is constitutive of the organisation. The notion of accountability suggests that actions are not random occurrences; they are recurrent; they are meaningful; and that they are linked to a coherent scheme (Lynch, 1993 in Cabraal, 1998). Furthermore, making actions accountable, for Teboho, means that they are public in the sense that their production can be witnessed as intelligible rather than being a private affair. However, for Teboho, accountability of action is an insufficient condition. She also demands “reflexivity of action” (ibid.: 5) as is evident in the following:

*The courses were later accredited by Cambridge, which accorded the certificate with a certain amount of status, but there was no logical follow through of asking, for instance: ‘now that you have this certificate, what are you doing with it?’ There was no way of establishing what really was achieved beyond providing teachers with certificates and keeping people employed in ELET.*

### 5.3.7 Reflexive Accountability

Reflexivity involves continuously interrogating and monitoring action. Giddens (1984: 3) regards the reflexivity of action as “the monitored character of the ongoing flow of social life”. This reflexive monitoring of action is a means of establishing whether change is a consequence of the conditions that produce the action.

While Teboho’s demand for reflexive accountability is essential for an NGO to preserve institutional legitimacy, a crucial caveat warrants some consideration. Reflexive monitoring presupposes a deep level of interrogation, beyond superficial indicators of observable reportable behaviours. It requires that the process of monitoring transcend the investigation of causal relationships between intervention and quantifiable change. It requires an interrogation of whether actors maintain continuing theoretical understandings of the grounds of their actions, and how these impacts on their institutional contexts. Do the evaluation rituals advocated and encouraged by funders promote reflexive monitoring? Surely, this is rhetorical question.

I have attempted, in this discussion, to demonstrate the unintended consequence of adopting a technocratic rationality in appraising the work of NGOs. I have argued that apart from the negative consequences this has for development workers, it further undermines the integrity of the funder who is often seen in the development world of being complicit in perpetuating the syndrome of disadvantage by turning accountability away from the beneficiaries towards the funders. We have seen, through an examination of Tracy’s discourses, how this manifests itself in her psyche. I have explored a challenge to Tracy’s discourses in Teboho’s conceptions of accountability. Is this an adequate explanation of the alienation that Tracy feels now? Perhaps not! I want to argue in the rest of this section that individuals working within NGOs evince similar character traits, have similar aspirations and like their counterparts in civil society, they require a reasonable degree of job security. This apparently palpable observation does in fact have profound implications for how one views development workers and the organisational structures that succeed or fail to sustain them.

### 5.3.8 The semantics of job descriptions

In Huberman’s (1993) research on the “Life Cycle of Teachers”, he identifies enduring trends or phases in the professional life of teachers. Following the *Career Entry Phase*, which is essentially a period of survival and discovery, is the *Stabilisation Phase*. In the latter, the teacher affirms a single subjective choice: the decision to commit oneself to the job. This phase is characterised by consolidation and pedagogical mastery. The *Experimentation and Diversification Phase*, characterised by the search for new ideas, new challenges and new commitments, sees the teacher attempting to increase his/her impact in the classroom by embarking on a series of personal experiments, such as in the use of instructional materials and methods of evaluation. In the *Phase of Reassessment*, the teacher may endure experiences ranging from a routine case of self-doubt to an existential mid-career crisis. Huberman suggests that the crisis of the assessment phase gives way to a *Phase of Serenity*, in which there is reconciliation, in neo-Freudian terms, between the ideal self and the real self. There is less to prove to oneself or to others; there is greater tolerance and spontaneity in the classroom. In the last, the *Disengagement Phase*, there is a gradual withdrawal and ‘interiorization’. One detaches



oneself progressively without regrets, taking more time for oneself and activities outside work.

Huberman's model provides a useful canvas to represent the competing institutional influences on Tracy's professional life. It has certainly come a long way in shedding the residue of nineteenth and early twentieth century social thought which tended to exaggerate the hold social institutions have on the conduct of the individual agent. However, there remains the familiar strain of sociological determinism in Huberman's theory, which fails to acknowledge the competing forces in social dynamics and the multifaceted nature of social reality. It fails to acknowledge that the social world is a contested one in which the lack of consensus between actors and groups of actors - in relation to divergent worldviews - is more pervasive (Giddens & Turner, 1987). The stage development model explored above usually coincides with parallel stages of career mobility to which individuals aspire. The extent to which their aspirations are fulfilled may influence attitudes towards their jobs and the institutions to which they belong.

There is however, a general perception in the public domain that members of an NGO are above and beyond the individualistic pursuits and aspirations of lay members of civil society; that the NGO worker possesses a 'humanitarian gene' that is impervious to the foibles of 'ordinary' citizens. For instance, the debate around issues of labour law at this strategic planning meeting is particularly instructive. Teboho's caution against the dangers of dabbling in the "*semantics of job descriptions*" derives from a 'generic' multi-national-corporate logic based on a Fordist notion of labour supply and demand. Typically, NGOs labour supply is characterized by 'fuzzy' boundaries in terms of very variable contractual conditions for people closely associated with the institution. Cameron (2000) illustrates this fuzziness as a set of concentric circles: a core of formally contracted staff; an inner ring of casual, short-term contracted employees/consultants; in the next ring, a group of volunteers, some of whom may be trustees, others aspiring employees; and, in the final ring, the target group of people who might expect benefits from the NGO. The state, international funding agencies, other NGOs, as well as commercial market institutions, may also have contractual relationships with the NGO. To what extent does this model typify the labour patterns at ELET? The staff profile summarised on pages 5 and 6 ("In Search of an Identity") reveals that the model does in fact encapsulate the labour patterns at ELET. If at face value, this arrangement mirrors a dominant model that has always characterized the non-profit sector, why does Teboho need to reaffirm (firmly) the necessity for this mode of organisational arrangement and why is there an apparent discomfort (although muted here, but articulated elsewhere in the narrative), with labour practices at ELET?

The discomfort experienced by Tracy and other members of ELET, at this point in its history, relates to the financial health of the organisation, a consequence of very limited and precarious sources of funding, which has serious implications for its viability. Despite its proven flexibility in managing crises in the past, the ability of members to sustain the organisation on the shrinking resources threatens its future.

If one ascribes the role of "redistributors of uncertainty" (Cameron, 2000:7) to NGOs, yet another picture emerges. In this perspective, NGOs are seen not only as an important institution in themselves, but are also catalysts in the creation and capacity building of grassroots institutions in order to represent more effectively their target groups of vulnerable, insecure (sometimes exploited) people, **as a means of reducing uncertainty amongst these groups**. If the total uncertainty in all societies is seen as close to a zero



sum game (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997 in Cameron, 2000), reduction of uncertainty for NGO target groups will tend to **increase uncertainty for other groups** and institutions in civil society, government and multilateral agencies, commercial institutions, and possibly even for the NGOs themselves. Inevitably, **increases in risk or uncertainty will be resisted by those with the power to do so.**

One way of 'maintaining uncertainty' is the 'engineering' and regulation of the labour market internationally. This engineering is evident, for instance, in the logic of the so-called 'tiger economies' of Asia, whose 'flexible specialisation' and 'just-in-time' production (Ball, 1998:2) utilises low-skill, insecure jobs, particularly in the service sectors. This mode of production, coupled with the feminisation of the labour market, guarantees a cheap flow of labour. Under conditions of flexible specialisation, alternative labour systems can exist side by side within the same space in such a way as to enable capitalist entrepreneurs to choose at will between them, and in the process, perpetuate inequalities necessary for the maintenance of neo-liberal economies (ibid.: 2). Maclure (2000), through his insightful study of NGOs in Africa, endorses this thesis:

*In order to divert forces of opposition from consolidating a counter hegemonic challenge, the hegemony of governing elites must be subject to constant adjustment and renewal. While this may take the form of extending additional benefits and services to potentially resistant groups, it may also necessitate the co-optation of the discourse of dissent. The language of hegemony and the content of education may thus be altered, but changes to the prevailing discourse are a strategic means of sustaining the prevalence of an inequitable status quo that is simultaneously beneficial for predominant elites and oppressive to the poor and disadvantaged.* (p.1)

Maclure suggests that NGOs have become the legitimate carriers of hegemony. Since the economic crisis in the 1980s, the imposition of structural adjustment programs and the emergence of NGOs as the main development agencies epitomises the ways in which the combined forces of world capital, international aid, and governing African elites have adapted to changing global circumstances. From this perspective, neo-liberal critics allege that NGOs have been complicit in the reinforcement of hegemonic adjustment and renewal, "for they are being transformed by foreign and national elites into vehicles that are de-politicizing the discourse of potential resistance and frustrating the emanation of a counter-hegemonic challenge to the structures of power and inequality in sub-Saharan Africa" (ibid.:1). As conduits of international donor funds, the non-governmental sector is perceived to have been co-opted by the neo-liberal New Policy Agenda of international development assistance, thus reinforcing the hegemony of foreign donors and African elites. Evidence for this, it is argued, is available through an interrogation of the dominant discourses of the movement. Is this a "reductionist" perspective, as Maclure (2000:1) suggests, or does it in fact accurately portray ELET's role as a development agency?

### 5.3.9 Mapping Corporate Cultures onto NGOs

In the context of the strategic planning meeting, Teboho's attempt to 'harmonise' the somewhat emotionally charged debate about job descriptions with a corporate voice does not imply a sinister 'circuit of performativity' (Hardy, 2000) in an attempt to 'maintain uncertainty', but it does signpost two important emerging features that have come to

characterise NGOs in recent times. First is the extent to which the corporate neo-liberal globalised discourse is infused into the discourse of a non-profit organisation, which in turn imbibes this discourse subliminally, as is evident in the accountant (Peter's) comments in the narrative, and the programme coordinator (Tracy's) arguments in this chapter. The second is the socialization or 'mapping' of organisational culture of corporate business onto NGOs. To what extent has this post-modern '*globaleconospeak*' irreversibly permeated the discourse of NGOs, which were once regarded as the most articulate voice of civil society? Does this new rationality run the risk of diluting the mission and agenda of this movement, or has the civil society movement, as it has come to be known, outlived its usefulness, calling for a fundamental reconceptualisation of its identity? I will return to these arguments in chapter 6 when I explore how NGOs, like higher education institutions, are deeply entangled in the web of complex, sometimes intriguing, interrelationships between the state, business and civil society, redefining the identity of the NGO, impacting on its structure and performance, and having implications for its role as an agency for research production in a knowledge economy. I wish to devote some attention here to exploring the extent to which ELET has imbibed the corporate discourse.

To aid this exploration, I appropriate the theoretical construct from the discipline of pure mathematics, (*isomorphism*) to exemplify the organisational structure that typifies the emerging identity of an NGO in a transitional democracy influenced by global forces. The prefix *iso*, from the Greek, means equal, identical, or similar. The root word, *morph*, also from the Greek, indicates a specified form, shape, or structure. The suffix, *ism* indicates an action, practice or process. So, an *isomorphism* can be interpreted as the process of two structures being of essentially equal form. The more formal mathematical statement would be that an *isomorphism* is a one-to-one correspondence (or bijection) between the elements of two sets such that the result of an operation on the elements of one set corresponds to the results of the analogous operation on their images in the other set (see Meyer and Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). NGOs in an emerging democracy increasingly assume a technocratic rationality (see Dhunpath, 2000), a feature that usually characterizes the corporate institution, which is itself invariably influenced by global corporate trends. This is particularly true if the NGO is dependent on the corporate institution for its administrative and personnel support. In these contexts, a potentially precarious relationship develops between the NGO and the corporate funders, where the corporate coerces the NGO to mimic a corporate culture as a precondition for continued aid.

DiMaggio and Powell, in their seminal work *"The iron cage revisited: institutional isomorphism and collective rationality in organisational fields"*, contend that organisational structure, which used to arise from the rules of efficiency in the marketplace, now arises from the institutional constraints imposed by the state and the professions. The efforts to achieve rationality with uncertainty and constraint lead to homogeneity of structure (institutional isomorphism). Isomorphism is a "constraining process that forces one unit in a population to resemble other units that face the same set of environmental conditions". There are two types of isomorphism: competitive and institutional, "Organisations compete not just for resources and customers, but for political power and institutional legitimacy, for social as well as economic fitness". DiMaggio and Powell identify three mechanisms of institutional isomorphic change: Coercive Isomorphism, Mimetic Isomorphism, and Normative Isomorphism. As these concepts will be elucidated more exhaustively in chapter 6, I will confine my comments

here to a brief explanation of the theory, and advance a series of questions on ELET's identity, which will be taken up in chapter 6.

**Coercive Isomorphism** is a reference to the tendency for organisations to submit to pressures from other organisations on which they are dependent, and by cultural expectations from society. Some are governmental mandates; some are derived from contract law, and financial reporting requirements. DiMaggio and Powell argue that organisations are increasingly homogeneous within given domains and increasingly organised around rituals of conformity to wider institutions. Hence, just as large corporations can have similar impact on their subsidiaries, a corporate donor can have a similar impact on the resource-dependent NGO. Does ELET evince the character of an organisation whose identity has been crafted as a consequence of the coercive influence of its funder?

If organisations in general are at the mercy of an uncertain institutional field, the uncertainty for NGOs is amplified by a variety of factors, notably, their vulnerability to changes in the field from which they derive their sustenance. In these contexts, organisations 'control' ambiguity by imitating established models of 'good' practice in the field. **Mimetic Isomorphism** is therefore an organisation's hedge against abrupt undulations in the field, while simultaneously providing a cushion on which innovation is risked. Does ELET demonstrate an inclination towards imitating successful models of best practice? What are these models, and how is the mimetic process likely to affect the identity of the NGO?

While uncertainty encourages imitation, organisational models can be diffused through employee migration or by consulting firms. These normative pressures, brought about by professionalisation, may be measured by the "universality of credential requirements" (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). The credentialing occurs through inter-organisational networks where norms developed in one context are diffused into other organisations. Inter-hiring between existing industrial firms encourages this kind of **Normative Isomorphism**. Furthermore, people from the same educational backgrounds will approach problems in much the same way. Socialization on the job reinforces these conformities. The similarities caused by these three processes allow firms to interact with each other more easily and to build legitimacy among organisations. It is not uncommon therefore, to find the same chairperson serving on the boards of several corporations concurrently. What kinds of normative pressure are at play in ELET's boardroom, and to what effect?

In chapter 6, I will subject these theoretical propositions to the empirical test. However, it would be naïve to assume that there is a linear rational link where "schools assume the structure of the workplace, and hospitals and university administrations come to resemble the management of for-profit firms... because societies, so it seems, are smart, while organisations are dumb" (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983: 156). I am also reluctant to subscribe to sociologies of determinism, by crediting individuals or discreet processes as sole architects of organisational structures. I am equally reluctant to subscribe to the proposition that organisations are unable to subvert the power of coercive influences. I therefore wish to devote the rest of this section to develop another thesis, which relates to the power of agency in shaping organisational identity and culture.

### 5.3.10 Individual/Institutional Agency and the Duality of Structures

In understanding the dynamics of institutional structures, my approach is informed by Giddens' (1984, 25), concept of "*Duality of Structures*". This construct refers to the "essentially recursive character of social life" (ibid.) Giddens postulates that in addition to human agency, structuration involves the role of social institutions defined as structured social practices that have a broad spatial and temporal extension (ibid.) - that is, as practices which, apart from operating concretely in time and space, also exhibit a paradigmatic 'structure'. Giddens differentiates between 'system' and 'structure', portraying social systems as practices concretely situated in space and time while depicting structure as non-temporal and non-spatial - as a virtual order of differences produced and reproduced in social interaction as its medium and outcome. The 'logic' of the macro-political, economic and ideological spheres both constrains and enables human action and consciousness, while at the same time this context is reproduced, challenged, or sometimes transformed by human thought and action. Moreover, because human agency is a factor, and because social formations contain contradictions, the potential for social transformation, however trivial, is inherent in all moments of reproduction.

The question that emerges is: how can the individual initiate social transformation when the individual agent is constantly derogated by hostile structures that subvert individual enterprise? Giddens' (1992:374) conception of the "*dialectic of control*" provides a useful attempt at answering these questions and is central to the notion of duality in social systems. He argues that the "weak" have the capability, in the regularised relations of autonomy and dependence that constitute social systems, to turn their weakness back against the powerful. Just as action is intrinsically related to power, so the dialectic of control is built into social systems. Power relations in social systems can be regarded as relations of autonomy and dependence: but no matter how imbalanced they may be in terms of power, actors in subordinate positions are never wholly dependent, and are often very adept at converting whatever resources they possess into some degree of control over the conditions of reproduction in the system. Thus, in any relationship in a social system, the most seemingly powerless individuals are able to "mobilise resources to enable them to carve out spaces of control" (ibid.), with respect to their day-to-day lives and the activities of the more powerful, altering the overall balance of power. While social constructions impinge on the individual, these social constructions are themselves shaped by human agency.

That ELET has displayed isomorphic tendencies in its evolution from an institution wholly dependent on its funder, to one that mutates towards mimicking the institutional ethic of its funder, is a feature that few individuals within ELET will deny. However, this isomorphic pressure is counterbalanced by the corresponding evolution of a progressive institutional culture and philosophy. There is an acute awareness amongst most members of ELET that unless the organisation responds to isomorphic pressures in innovative ways, with contextually relevant programmes, it will be relegated to the archives of dysfunctional NGOs. ELET has therefore responded by appropriating international models of best practice. Over the past two decades, at least, research into language learning and teaching, particularly in the USA, UK and Canada, have progressively eroded conventional borders of curriculum and methodology, resulting in the established canon of language teaching being transgressed in many contexts, particularly in those which cater for significant numbers of non-native speakers of the target language (see



Kerfoot, 1993; Lankshear, 1987; Pierce, 1989). While most language development institutions in South Africa continue to operate on traditional purist models of language teacher development, ELET has made strategic shifts in its programme offerings, focussing now on social and community development programmes such as its Project for Health and Sanitation Education (PHASE) and Primary English Teaching in Rural Areas (PETRA) (see Samuel et al., 1998: 396,402). Both these programmes are in line with NGO thinking internationally: that empowering women and rural groups can only come about by developing local literacies through participatory rural action (PRA) (Watson, 1997). This approach, based on the Regenerated Freirian Literacy Through Empowerment Community Techniques (REFLECT) has enjoyed success in El Salvador, Uganda, and Bangladesh (Cottingham, 1996 in Watson, 1997:7). While not abandoning its mission of being a language service provider, I see in this shift an attempt by ELET to tap into the opportunities offered by a society in transition, and an attempt to procure its survival in a volatile NGO climate without submitting wholly to coercive, mimetic or normative forces. ELET's decision to shift from the mainstream to the marginal reflects a courageous attempt to affirm its autonomy as an agent of development. The following excerpts from an interview with the director reveal some of the tensions, possibilities and promises of an institution charting a different course.

*I think it is important to realise that we can no longer function with a narrow focus of promoting English as a language when the context does not support it. We have to acknowledge the existence of other variables that are undermining the effectiveness of our work. We cannot pretend to be functioning normally unless we address the structural deficiencies that undermine the success of our efforts. Approaching language development in this way allows us to address a host of other developmental issues. For instance, in dealing with a health and sanitation project, we challenge a host of social maladies and gender stereotypes. Whereas previously it was the responsibility and domain of the girls to fetch the water, now through the programme we have succeeded in changing the cultural roles of men and women. The interesting thing is that they reflect on these issues and talk about it openly. We are also eroding certain cultural misnomers about health and fitness. One of the things we discovered is that when children had diarrhoea, they were given enemas as a remedy. This is quite absurd as this causes further dehydration and death. Through the programme, children learn what diarrhoea is and what it leads to and share this knowledge with their parents.*

While it is difficult to find a definition of literacy that is universally accepted, there is at least consensus that to be literate means different things in different contexts. There is growing consensus that the perspectives on literacy and illiteracy are shaped by social, economic, political and cultural dimensions. Given the complexities of literacy in general, defining ESL literacy as the ability to read and write is simplistic and reductionist (see Wrigley, 1993). In the above discourse, Tracy articulates a fundamental reconceptualisation of traditional notions of literacy towards the conception of a continuum that expands as learners acquire different kinds of literacies. The continuum includes (but is not limited to) functional literacy (using literacy to accomplish everyday tasks); socio cultural literacy (understanding differences in literacy practices among groups); expressive literacy (the ability to articulate feelings and express ideas); and critical literacy (the ability to comprehend one's socio-political circumstances and the consequent ability to comprehend alternatives) (Wrigley, 1993: 451). A survey of a cross

section of ELET's curriculum documents hereafter, reveals a distinct inclination towards appropriating the language of these diverse forms of literacy as mechanism for emancipation of learners and their communities.

### 5.3. 11 Concluding Comments

In this section, I have attempted to answer a series of questions ranging from institutional identity to psychosocial identities and labour practices in an NGO. I have observed a curious irony relating to the character of an NGO: that while NGOs are inherently entropic, they simultaneously carry the mechanisms for self-perpetuation as members of the organisation are inclined to resist dissolution of the organisation. I have homed in on another curious irony: Tracy's simultaneous desire for stability... and disengagement from the organisation. This points to NGO work as patently alienating, often fracturing the 'personal self' from the 'organisational self', having profound implications for the nature of employment practices in NGOs. The alienation is compounded by the rigid bureaucratic empiricist reporting mechanisms demanded by donors and funders, which often undermines meaningful development, leading to instrumentalism devoid of humanism, relegating NGOs to 'development subcontractors'. This vigorous attack on 'professionalisation' of the NGO is defended by Teboho, who calls for reflexive accountability for institutional legitimacy. This section also attempted to locate the 'postmodern' NGO within the global economy, to determine the extent to which it has been co-opted by the neo-liberal agenda. I appropriated the theory of isomorphism to understand the coercive, mimetic and normative influences of corporate donors on NGOs in the context of globalisation. I end this section with the proposition that notwithstanding the potential for isomorphism, NGOs like ELET do possess the necessary agency to 'innovate rather than replicate', as is evidenced in some of its teacher development curricula.

In the section that follows, I interrogate these curriculum documents to appraise the extent to which the espoused mission of emancipation is enacted in the curriculum as practice. I begin this section by sketching the philosophical basis and theoretical roots of an emancipatory literacy agenda, followed by a deconstructive analysis of selected components of ELET's curriculum.

## Section D

### 5.4 In Search of an Emancipatory Literacy

#### 5.4.1 Literacy as Cultural Politics

*In the broadest sense, literacy is best understood as a myriad of discursive forms and cultural competencies that construct and make available the various relations and experiences that exist between learners and the world (Giroux, 1988)*

ESL literacy is a discipline that combines ideas from applied linguistics, anthropology, and cognitive science. Once characterized by structuralist approaches aimed at attaining fluency in the target language, the field has evolved significantly over the years. The evolution includes a greater emphasis on communication and meaning-making, consideration of the ways language and literacy are used in various social contexts, and greater use of the learners' native language in teaching initial literacy (see Wrigley, 1993). Using practices supported by cognitive theory and research in second language acquisition, they promote second language acquisition as a process of meaning-making that links the experience of the learner to culture, language, literacy, and learning. However, in South Africa, these programmes are still the exception. In many classrooms, literacy is taught as a set of discreet technical skills, disconnected from the schema of the learners and the social and cultural contexts that govern their lives.

Critical theorists Freire (1972), Giroux (1998) and Arnowitz (1985) argue for the theorizing of literacy as a form of cultural politics, which assumes that the social, cultural, political, and economic dimensions of everyday life are the primary categories for understanding contemporary schooling. Within this context, schooling is not regarded as a "unitary, monolithic and ironclad system of rules and regulations, but as a cultural; terrain characterized by the production of experiences and subjectivities amidst varying degrees of accommodation, contestation and resistance" (Giroux, 1998:254).

Central to this notion of literacy are the productive meanings that students bring as part of the production of knowledge and the construction of personal and social identities. Giroux proposes five essential ingredients of a radical pedagogy that is empowering. Firstly, developing a radical pedagogy consistent with this view of literacy involves reconceptualising the very nature of the curriculum discourse. Fundamentally, it asks whether the curriculum contains the mechanisms for legitimization of dominant discourses, or whether it has the capacity for transformative and empowering forms of pedagogy. Secondly, a critical pedagogy "must take seriously the articulation of a morality that posits a language of public life, emancipatory community and individual social commitment" (ibid.: 257). Thirdly, the type of pedagogy proposed by radical theorists is one concerned with the problems and needs of the students as the starting point. It requires that educators be attentive to the contradictory nature of student experiences while being conscious of the dangers of romanticising those experiences. Fourthly, as part of the discourse of literacy and voice, critical educators need to interrogate the social and political interests that construct their own voice and hence see themselves as learners. Fifthly, it calls for educators to be vigilant about the insidious role of the school in reproducing ideology while subordinating the voices of students. Since student subjectivity and cultural identity are themselves contradictory, it is



necessary to associate students' production of meaning to the various discourses and social formations outside of schools that actively construct their contradictory experiences and subjectivities (ibid.: 258). Finally, Giroux argues that a critical literacy is not simply about empowering students; it also speaks to the project of empowering educators as part of the larger project of reconstruction.

Using the critical theory as a heuristic framework, I wish to use Jansen and Reddy's (1998) curriculum analysis framework to interrogate the modalities of ELET's teacher development curriculum. Jansen and Reddy propose a framework that analyses impact, design and relevance to policy (Table 7). Since an impact analysis falls outside the scope of this project, I will focus on the design principles and their relevance to national curriculum policy.

Table 7: Curriculum Analysis Framework

EXTERNAL <i>Micro level</i>	<b>Impact Analysis</b> What is the impact of the curriculum?	What are the effects of the curriculum?
INTERNAL	<b>Design Analysis</b> Does the curriculum satisfy acceptable design principles?	What theories, principles, methods, standards and assumptions underpin the curriculum?
EXTERNAL <i>Macro level</i>	<b>Policy Analysis</b> Is the curriculum policy relevant?	What is the relevance of the curriculum in relation to a particular set of social policies?

Design analysis involves appraising the curriculum in terms of standard or agreed design principles. As there is no single set of design principles to assess a curriculum, each set of principles offer a particular perspective on the design. Because ELET's teacher development curriculum espouses a critical literacy framework, it will be analysed in terms of the critical literacy framework proposed by critical theorists. These questions will not serve as a checklist to measure compliance of the curriculum to predetermined protocols, but will merely act as a sensitising tool, to appraise the spirit and intent of the curriculum and its potential to achieve its espoused outcomes. In exploring the relevance of ELET's curriculum for policy, Curriculum 2005 will be the de facto policy under consideration as this was the official policy of the period investigated. Here too, its broad philosophy and principles will be considered to determine whether its spirit is articulated in ELET's curriculum.

The analysis will be confined to two broad areas of ELET's work, which comprises a cross section of ELET's primary activities: The first area is the environment and health projects. Here, the focus will be on the **Project for Health and Sanitation**, as this represents a major component of ELET's work. A major source of data used in the analysis is derived from a report compiled by the programme manager of PHASE, Tracy Brownlee, in her "Critique of forms of participatory development and communication: A case study of PHASE" (1998). A further source of data is Tracy Brownlee's narratives in sections 7,8 and elsewhere in the chapter entitled "Vignettes, Snapshots, and Freeze-



frames". A discourse analysis of these vignettes will complement the curriculum analysis in a discursive way.

The second area explored relates to the **language teacher development intervention programmes and courses**. The focus of attention here will be the **Language teaching module** in the national teacher qualification known commonly as the **Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE)**. The reason for selecting this programme is that it reflects ELET's most recent contribution to teacher development. The analysis will be supplemented by discourse analysis of selected vignettes of Mervin's narratives in chapters 1, 2, 3, and 9 of the chapter entitled "Vignettes, Snapshots, and Freeze-frames". The vignettes will be selected for their potential to provide theoretical, philosophical and methodological insights into the language development programmes offered by ELET.

#### 5.4.2 National Policies, Personal Consequences

An important component of this analysis is an examination of the relevance of ELET's curriculum to emerging policy developments nationally as well as globally, in particular, the relevance of PHASE to Education policy, with specific reference to Curriculum 2005, OBE and language literacy. Several writers<sup>61</sup> have highlighted the disjuncture between the assumptions underlying literacy policies and programme practices, and the experiences of "those for whom, but frequently not with whom, they have been developed" (Wiley, 1993). These writers have argued the importance of ethnographic research to inform policy. Historically, language policies have served a number of functions. In South Africa, as in the rest of Africa, language and literacy policies have been used as instruments of gate keeping (De Klerk, 1995; Cele, 2000) and as instruments of social control (Ngugi, 1993; de Klerk, 2002). Usually, the struggle for language rights is one that is fought by minority groups, where the majority dominant groups exercise power through "coercion" and upon the "manufacture of consent" (Herman & Chomsky, 1988 in Wiley, 1993). Hegemony is achieved when dominant groups create consensus by convincing subjugated groups to accept their norms and expectations when they can convince those who fail within the system to view their failure as a personal problem, a consequence of their biographical circumstances. Literacy has been used to restrict access to mainstream education, economic participation and political activity (Wiley, 1993:422). Under the guise of "educational remedy" it has also been used to promote and impose behavioural norms and dominant groups (ibid.: 422). Ironically, in South Africa, the situation is a *volte-face*. Here, the politically enfranchised minority that propelled the apartheid state has been responsible for engineering language policies to disenfranchise the majority. The new language in education policy, heralded as the most sophisticated in the world, is intended to reverse the status quo by embracing multilingualism and a critical language literacy. Does ELET's work have the capacity to further the national agenda?

To answer this question, I explore ELET's responsiveness to the policy process, examining the extent to which its curriculum is evidence that it has embraced the spirit

<sup>61</sup> See also Classen and Burnaby (1993) who examine the national policy governing English Literacy in the US and the personal consequences thereof; Kerfoot (1993) who examine the contradictions and challenges of participatory education in a South African Context; Bell (1993) who explores the teacher as bridge between programme and practice.

and philosophy of Curriculum 2005.<sup>62</sup> I begin by providing a synthesis of its basic tenets and proceed to discourse analysis of selected documents representing ELET's curriculum, as well as interview transcripts, in an attempt to answer some critical questions. Broadly conceived, and generic, the following questions, which emerge out of a critical theory framework to curriculum deconstruction explained in 5.4 above, will guide the analysis:

#### **A. Design Analysis**

- Who designed the curriculum?
- What are the guiding principles and values of the curriculum?
- What set of conditions does the curriculum seek to address?
- What social, political, economic or cultural contexts does it seek to respond to?
- Is the curriculum perspective justifiable?
- What does the curriculum perspective illuminate or conceal?
- Does the curriculum perspective address different categories (teaching, learning, knowledge, society, resources) in a coherent and consistent way?

#### **B. Policy Analysis**

- Does the curriculum reflect the spirit, vision and principles articulated in curriculum 2005?
- Does the curriculum specify clear and consistent learning outcomes (competencies), which its trainees could accomplish by the end of the programme?
- Does the curriculum meet the standards reflected in similar programmes that are already accredited?
- Does the curriculum adequately equip students to proceed to a higher level of training or schooling in formal or non-formal institutions?

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<sup>62</sup> Note that at the time of writing of this thesis, the national policy known as Curriculum 2005 is undergoing review. A national task team was set up to advise the minister of education on a policy that was less convoluted and more accessible than C2005. The outcome of the review process was a revised curriculum known as curriculum 21.

In an attempt to interrogate the pedagogy of ELET, an analysis of the following documents is undertaken.

**Table 8: Documents Analysed**

Programme Focus	Document Title	Document Type	Date
Environment and Health	1. The Health and Environment Programmes in Schools	Proposal - Siyathuthuka Initiative	200
	2. Schools Female Hygiene Project	Proposal to Department of Education	200
	3. Support for the KZN DEC Life Skills/HIV- AIDS Programme	Final report to Department of Education	200
	4. "Outlet" Focus on ELET	Newsletter for SANTAG	
Language Teacher Development intervention programmes and courses	5. The Developing Language for Learning Project	Discussion Paper	200
	6. Developing Educators' Skills as Learning Mediators	Executive Summary	200
	7. Language Teaching in The Intermediate and GET Phases:	Student Guide for Module 1	200
	8. Language Teaching in The Intermediate and GET Phases: Communicative Language Teaching	Learning Guide for Module 1	200
	9. Language Teaching in The Intermediate and GET Phases:	Tutor Guide for Module 1	200
	10. Language-Related Disadvantage in Schools in South Africa & Namibia	Memorandum/Conference Paper	200

### 5.4.3 Theoretical & Philosophical Roots and Implications of ELET's Language Teaching Module

The ACE language-teaching module is grounded in the theory of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), an interpretivist conception of how a second language is acquired. In section A of this chapter, I explored briefly how CLT has come to have a diluted and reductionist flavour under the banner of curriculum 2005, resulting in the degeneration of communicative competence to mean oral competence. In the following discussion, I interrogate the brand of CLT that ELET advocates and practices, as evidenced in the document entitled: *Language Teaching in The Intermediate and GET Phases: Communicative Language Teaching- Learning Guide for Module 1; Tutor Guide for Module 1; Student Guide for Module 1*.

The underlying theory of the CLT approach is communicative competence (Hymes, 1972). To achieve communicative competence, it is not sufficient for students to simply learn linguistic structures and grammar rules, they also need the competence to interpret the social significance of speech. CLT pays systematic attention to functional as well as structural aspects of language. In reaction to the grammar-translation and audio-lingual methods, the CLT approach emphasizes the communicative activities that involve the authentic use of language in daily life situations. The essential features of a communicative approach are that:

1. Language is acquired as a whole and not piecemeal, step by step or linearly. Therefore, there is little merit in dismantling the language into discreet technical components and learning them in a disembodied way.
2. The child acquires the language with his/her whole being, that is, with feelings, imagination subconscious and mind. Both hemispheres of the brain are active in the process of language acquisition.
3. The emphasis in language acquisition is on meaning and not form.
4. Learners acquire a language by using it.
5. The teacher is no longer in the centre of the classroom, but on the periphery.

While CLT has the ingredients of a social constructivist approach to language teaching, it might be useful to examine its ideological roots. Historically, the decision to impose policies to entrench the status of the dominant language is linked to other forms of discrimination. For instance, in the USA, the imposition of literacy requirement for immigrants was linked to the need to impose some sort of quota on the millions of foreign nationals flooding its shores. On the other hand, industrialists who benefited from the cheap flow of immigrant labour opposed the exclusionary literacy requirements. The compromise for 'Americanizers' was for the immigrants to surrender their mother tongues and cultures as a precondition for admission. As compensation, they were offered the prospect of social mobility if they acquired the necessary competence in oral English and English literacy (See Wiley, 1993: 424). Failure to acquire English literacy (regarded as 'illiteracy') was considered a personal failure that could only be "abrogated through the intervention of language literacy programmes" (ibid.: 424). This spawned an industry of publications and materials offering intervention programmes to make the foreigners literate.

The implications of the above for the South African context are manifold. Firstly, while Curriculum 2005 espouses an emancipatory Communicative Language Teaching curriculum framework, its potential to transcend the audio lingual and grammar-translation approaches is somewhat doubtful for at least two reasons. On the one hand, South Africa has imported the same brand of CLT invented in the USA and the UK into its classrooms, with potentially the same (unintended) socio-political effect of cultural assimilation. On the other hand, since the curriculum statement is locked in the realm of political rhetoric, the absence of substantive input in terms of human and material resources will compound the potential residual effect of inappropriate methodologies. International experience shows that in second or foreign language contexts, teachers have never really abandoned the direct methods in teaching grammar (see Thornby, 1998; Owino, 2002; Barkhuizen, 1998). On the contrary, Thornbury suggests that texts such as *Murphy's English Grammar Use*, of which more than 7 million copies have been sold, "indicates the extent to which the English Language Teaching (ELT) industry has colluded in maintaining the view that language learning means learning the grammar" (p: 110).

Secondly, the imposition of a structuralist methodology on a CLT framework is patently contradictory, as Willis (1990, in Thornbury, 1998) proposes:

*... there is a basic contradiction in a methodology that is organised around a syllabus of preselected, discrete grammatical items while purporting to be driven by the meanings that learners wish to express... It is inconsistent to say to learners, "Say whatever you mean,... but use the third conditional".*



My own experience as a teacher of English, for more than two decades in first and second language contexts, enables me to endorse this view. My recent experience of data collection in rural KZN secondary schools into language teaching and learning practices reaffirms this view.<sup>63</sup> It also reaffirms Lorty's (1975) assertion that under an apprenticeship of observation, teachers will continue to teach the way they were taught.

Thirdly, despite its flirtation with the language of critical language literacy, CLT is shackled to a grammatical syllabus with the result that "the linguistic tail is wagging the communicative dog" (Wilkins, 1976 in Thornbury, 1998:110). Why is this the case? Several reasons may be advanced, depending on who identifies the problem. It is often argued that the main source of the problem is that in the absence of support for alternative approaches, grammar offers teachers a life raft. By its very nature, grammar imposes order on chaos. Teachers, it would seem, prefer lock step, routinised, narrowly defined, easily testable procedures. Grammar offers this comfort. More importantly, grammar-focused instruction helps maintain the power balance between teacher and learner and it is easy to rationalise this power dynamics by suggesting that learners want grammar even though teachers may deem it inappropriate.

Fourthly, where teachers have responded to the seductive appeal of CLT, a troubling slide has characterised the curriculum, which in some instances is even more deleterious than the structuralist approach. Mervin encapsulates this dilemma in his observation that:

*...with the new curriculum (2005), which is an integrated curriculum there is very strong thematic approach. The result is that certain basic skills are slipping through. There is a nice and fuzzy and warm ambiguity about it... and it is politically correct and quite creative and exciting...(but) it also leads to a degeneration of the communicative process, when structures are ignored and there is no progression from a simplistic interchange through the oral process to something more substantial. In this context, CLT is oversimplified to mean oral communication at the expense of developing other productive and cognitive skills.*

Are the foundational principles of CLT irrevocably anachronistic? I think not. An examination of ELET's teacher development curriculum reveals that it is possible to transport CLT beyond the trappings of the grammar translation approach, given the necessary systemic support from different constituencies: namely the department of education, funding agencies and the learning sites themselves. The notable difference between the CLT curriculum critiqued above and ELET's teacher development curriculum is that ELET uses the CLT approach as the point of departure. In other words, it acknowledges as a starting point that for educators to extricate themselves from their behaviourist positioning, they need the tools by which to deconstruct their ontologies and practices in a non-confrontational way that is simultaneously destabilising and affirming. It destabilises educators' positionality by allowing them the space to collaboratively interrogate their practices by providing an alternative 'cognitivist' conception of language learning, without overtly advocating its merits (ACE Learning Guide: p11). It is affirming in that it allows educators to intuitively appraise the value of the approach

<sup>63</sup> See Dhunpath R, (2002) "A Tale of Two Schools" An occasional paper that provides a critical reflection of an impact analysis of a curriculum intervention programme for language teaching in the KZN region.

without dismissing the behaviourist approach, which into which educators have already been socialised.

Secondly, while the LLC curriculum policy aligns itself to the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996), the South African Schools Act (1996) which advocates a policy of multi-lingualism, the ELET curriculum embraces the multilingual philosophy concretely.

*Although we still have projects where we focus on improving children's proficiency in English, we have shifted our focus to the languages of learning, where we focus on improving access to learning through language. We have a pilot project with four schools where we focus on the language problems and how teachers are coping with this. We are focusing on what we call BIC: the Basic Interactional Competences together with the Cognitive Language Proficiencies (CLP). The focus has shifted towards language as tool for learning rather than focusing on developing competence in English alone as has been the case in the past. We now adopt a multilingual approach, looking at how language mediates learning.*  
(Mervin, Chapter 3)

Tracking the evolution of the teacher development interventions from the earlier pre-packaged University of Cambridge courses like the COTE, DOTE, CEMT, to the present ACE module, significant variations can be observed. The Cambridge courses, despite their prestige value, were essentially context-specific (the overseas context) and theory-driven. Hence, the potential of these courses to admit local contextual realities into the curriculum design, was limited to the teachers' own worldview. The ACE model, on the other hand, is 'home grown'.

*...we have learned significant lessons from our efforts at diversification beyond language programmes such as the PHASE project... To me the project has a vital role to play in reconceptualising the role of ELET in a changing democracy. I'm beginning to conceive of ELET in this new paradigm, not as an English Language Institute, but one that plays a more developmental role within a broader developmental framework.*  
(Mervin, chapter 3)

The ACE module emerged out of at least two decades of research<sup>64</sup> into schools with 'real' methodological challenges that teachers routinely face in their classrooms. ELET has been able to appropriate this experience and apply it to other learning areas, giving substance to the principle of whole school development, which is often an abstract notion.

*The course focuses on improving performance in other content-specific subjects by making teachers more language sensitive in their teaching. We believe that all teachers, not just English teachers, need this kind of training because many of the discipline-specific concepts are wrapped in language that is inaccessible; it's really hard to separate the two. Instead of concentrating on structural components of the language such as verbs and nouns, we concentrate on how to teach concepts. We examine concepts, observe how they are mediated in*

<sup>64</sup> I use the word 'research' loosely but advisedly. Despite the significant contribution, ELET has made to second language teaching and learning over the past two decades, and the significant store of knowledge it has accumulated, it cannot claim currency for its ideas because it has not functioned as a research organisation.

*language and look at textbooks to see how we can improve the text to make it more meaningful and accessible. This is a particularly relevant course because the demographics in most of our schools in KZN have changed, where 60% of the children are Zulu-speaking but are still being forced to use English as the medium of instruction.*  
(Mervin, chapter 3)

ESL curriculum designs have often been criticised for excluding learners from the decision-making process. This, Barkhuizen (1998) regards as a 'blind spot' in curriculum design. Dealing effectively with individual language classrooms, requires teachers to be able to take into account, "not only the pedagogical but also the social and personal complexities influencing classroom practices" (Cray & Currie, 1996 in Barkhuizen, 1998: 86). Beyond involving learners in the decision-making process, Barkhuizen suggests that no curriculum can claim to be truly learner centred unless the learners' subjective needs are considered. The subjective needs include a consideration of the conditions that inhibit or facilitate learning. Is ELET's curriculum design sensitive to the social context?

#### **5. 4.4 Acknowledging the Social Context in Literacy Education**

The project for Health and Sanitation is one of ELET's environment and hygiene interventions, funded by the European Union/Mvula Trust and later by USAID. It was conceived in response to ELET's acknowledgement that the environmental contexts in which they were working did not support and promote the sustenance of literacy interventions. This is consistent with a global acknowledgement that literacy education is most effective if it is tied to the lives of the learners and reflects their experiences as community members. The adoption of this principle necessitated, firstly, acknowledging that the contextual realities of learners' environments are central to the design of the curriculum. Secondly, any attempt at changing these contexts requires a participatory outcome based approach (OBE) using the principles of whole school development. In an attempt to identify potential sites for the PHASE intervention, ELET developed a set of indicators coined broadly as "characteristics of an unloved school". Schools, which evinced three or more of the following indicators, were deemed 'unloved':

- Poorly landscaped grounds and learners' homesteads
- Poor waste disposal resulting in extensive litter, rubble and rodents
- Buildings in state of disrepair, broken fences, windows, doors, desks, etc
- Grounds infested with alien invader plants and weeds
- Lack of trees and greenery, gardens muddy, less shade in summer and dusty in winter
- Unhealthy sanitation, lack of water, dirty toilets
- Lack of pride in school
- No self help, over reliant on external funding

The broad objectives of the project are to improve the physical appearance of the schooling environment. Further, it aims to promote health awareness of the school and the neighbourhood in which learners and community members live and become custodians of the environment. Another important focus is the skilling of educators and learners so that they can devise and implement a programme of upgrading the aesthetic dimension while cultivating a healthy environment.

Having identified potential participating sites, schools are invited to a briefing session and encouraged to apply to be part of the project if they satisfy predetermined criteria. The criteria include the following:

- ❖ Rural and semi-urban schools that have at least three characteristics of an “unloved school”
- ❖ A principal committed to changing the school
- ❖ Learner, educator and community interest in the project
- ❖ Potential for security and survival of greenery and other improvements to the school
- ❖ A minimum token contribution from the school
- ❖ Schools amenable to clustering (clusters of 10 to 20 are advised)

#### **5.4.5 Implementation of the project**

In consultation with the local education department and other interest groups, 10 to 20 schools are identified. A series of four, one-day workshops (one per school term) are held at a nodal school for principals, heads of department and members of the School Governing Body (SGB). Educators then cascade the programmes to learners (see appendix 6 & 7). Typically, the workshops focus on the following:



Table 9: Implementation of **PHASE** Workshops

Workshop	Workshop Focus and Content
Workshop 1	Critical self – evaluation to ascertain the reasons for the conditions that prevail, focussing specifically on the aesthetic and health aspects of the school
Workshop 2	Developing an environment policy for the school and focussing on ways in which the policy could be implemented.
Workshop 3	Developing a health policy at the school, focussing on coping with diseases such as AIDS and cholera
Workshop 4	<p>To skill educators and learners to enable them to devise and implement a programme of upgrading the appearance of the school and the neighbourhood by engaging in the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Planting indigenous trees</li> <li>➤ Basic hygiene in caring for the schools ablution blocks</li> <li>➤ Exterminating alien plants</li> <li>➤ Water conservation and making optimum use of running water</li> <li>➤ Setting up gardens and nurseries at schools</li> <li>➤ Hygienic waste disposal</li> <li>➤ Entrepreneurship</li> <li>➤ Developing self-help skills</li> <li>➤ Fund-raising and self reliance</li> </ul>

## 5. 4.6 Analysis of the Project Curriculum

### 5.4.6.1 Introduction

The design principles of the curriculum are informed by a cross-curricular, project-based model, which challenges the disconnected disciplinary based approaches dominant in the traditional curriculum. It is based on the principle that participatory development and communication are a means “to stimulate critical analysis, to develop confidence and awareness, and to organise groups and communities (Ad Boeren, 1994:47, in Brownlee, 1998). Conceived on the Freirean model of dialogical critical pedagogy, it emphasises a respect for the humanness of others, which requires dialogical communication and action; an early Marxist utopian hope that humans have a destiny, which is more than fulfilment of material needs; that collective solutions are needed for social problems (see Brownlee, 1998:18). Tracy articulates the essence of this philosophy:

*There seems to be a realisation that effective learning cannot take place in conditions where children are plagued by waterborne diseases and the lack of sanitation. Its also about valuing children as human beings, and the environment we create for them sends out this signal about how they fit into society, which in turn affects their self esteem and how they perform.*

Part of affirming the self-esteem of learners involves introducing literacy in the native language, which serves as a bridge to ESL literacy. Native language literacy approaches have been used successfully in regions where non-literate learners share a common language (Agnihotri, 1995; Adler & Reed, 2002)

A distinguishing feature of ELET's curriculum is that it is not contingent upon the provision of new infrastructure, such as toilets and other buildings, the absence of which often renders any intervention dysfunctional. It aims to empower learners to make optimal use of existing (inadequate) facilities. The design allows educators a platform to implement the OBE/Curriculum 2005 policy in an immediate and tangible way. The inherently participatory nature of the project allows learners to identify the problem to be investigated and remedied while teachers act as facilitators and mentors, guiding learners' interaction with the problems identified.

The participatory character of the project is reflected in the materials development process. Trainer teachers<sup>65</sup> developed the materials at the first workshop and then tested them at their own schools. The trainer teachers' feedback from the 'pilot' sessions was a vital ingredient for the redesign of the materials before they were printed. ELET played a crucial role in managing these discussions so that the sessions were developmental. The trainer teachers then developed their own workshops with the support of ELET and conducted them at their sites. Finally, the post-project evaluation was conducted to assess the degree to which learners embraced the project and the extent to which it impacted on their knowledge and how this was manifest in changes to the physical environment.

#### **5.4.6.2. Teachers as Learners: Learners as Researchers**

Central to an analysis of an emancipatory curriculum are the questions "Who designed the curriculum"? and "Does the curriculum adequately equip students to proceed to a higher level of training or schooling in formal or non-formal institutions"? Pivotal to the PHASE programme is its research focus: learners, educators and other 'stakeholders' under the guidance of the trainer teacher are required to: a) investigate the problem from the context of their experiences; b) analyse the problem and its underlying cause/s, as a group; c) act as a group towards addressing the problem. All of these are initiated in pursuit of the Freirian ideal of authentic dialogue between learners and educators to enable a participatory research culture towards empowering individuals to act and change their contexts. ELET had a distinct advantage in implementing this programme since its trainer teachers were selected from a pool of committees established over the years through its ESL intervention programmes. These teachers developed facilitation skills, which were valuable in the training of teachers. That most of these teachers were

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<sup>65</sup> Trainer Teachers are those teachers who voluntarily participate in ELET's programmes. Once trained, they are expected to cascade their knowledge and methods to other teachers at their schools.

English language teachers was a further advantage in that they were more receptive to the ideas because of their multi-disciplinary outlook, as Tracy clarifies:

*We have worked, to a large extent, with language teachers on this project because there is a strong communications base in the programme and also because the language curriculum is more flexible and linked to research skills.*

#### 5.4.6.3 Empowerment through Transfer of Knowledge

Another key outcome identified by ELET was to develop a model of project work that was portable: the skills accumulated from the PHASE project should empower participants to transfer knowledge and behaviour to other contexts. Although the focus on developing awareness of environment and health issues was an instrumental goal in itself, the more enduring benefits were evident in the processes, which educators and learners internalised. For example, Brownlee (1998:23), suggests that learners were able to import project investigation and planning processes into other classes, “*much to the astonishment of their teachers*”. When faced with issues of content knowledge (especially in Science), learners challenged their teachers: “*But have you identified the problem properly?*” or “*You can’t just say what action should be taken until you have investigated what has caused the problem!*”

If transfer of knowledge is a litmus test for success, then it may be claimed that the skills garnered in the language class were both enduring and empowering. However, Brownlee cautions that such successful transfer of knowledge was the exception rather than the rule. She ascribes this to the tendency for educators to take refuge in traditional practices when faced with unfamiliar materials. She is also critical of the notion of knowledge-transfer, particularly in contexts where cultural conceptions of ‘traditional’ knowledge are in conflict with ‘scientific’ knowledge<sup>66</sup>. However, these contexts are regarded as opportunities for learning and hence constitute the content for further exploration using a variety of methods including comic-stories (see appendix 7) and role-play. The positive spin off from this approach is that learners are able to relay these learnings to their family members despite the resistance generated from challenging established practices.

Tracy summarises the value of the programme:

*The effectiveness of the programme is particularly apparent when you consider that it focuses on such important real life issues rather than contrived, hypothetical scenarios often found in textbooks. It is important for teachers to receive academic training, but this project focuses on the conditions under which training takes place. In all of the sites we have intervened, most schools have really rallied behind our programme because they see what a remarkable difference the project makes in communities.*

A significant feature of PHASE is that its design is a product of two elements of Tracy’s professional identity. The first is Tracy’s agency, which is an expression of her “lay ontology” (see Calori, 2002). Calori notes the links between philosophy and practice, and suggests that the analysis of participant’s narratives can be used to elicit their ‘lay’

<sup>66</sup> Brownlee alludes to the case of ‘enemas’, which are sacrosanct in Zulu culture and are used routinely in the treatment of diarrhoea. Such a treatment is discouraged by medical practitioners and brings into conflict ‘traditional’ and “Western’ mores.

ontologies as a way of making explicit their theoretical orientations. The second component of her professional identity is her academic training:

*My honours degree in cultural and media studies has influenced the way in which I relate to issues of social development. My research there, through a case study, focussed on participatory forms of communication. The whole notion of participatory communication has become something of a buzzword now, but I took the opportunity to learn about developmental principles in relation to communication.*

Calori suggests that the essence of organisational capability is the integration of an individual's specialized knowledge, and their intuitive knowledge, which can generate new combinations of existing knowledge. Integration and new combinations are produced by organisational members who translate their ontological beliefs into organisational strategy. In this way, ontological beliefs are imprinted on the organisation's identity. However, this is not a conscious, systematic overtly discernible process. It is largely a process of what Bergson (1983) calls "an ontology of creative dialectical evolution", suggesting that as individuals experience their roles, they make these experiences accessible for reflection, which in turn contributes to their stock of knowledge.

Interestingly, although the literacy component of the PHASE programme is perhaps its strongest virtue, the programme does not overtly make any claims about this dimension, as Tracy indicates:

*The link between language and literacy and the PHASE project is a slightly tenuous one, but it does highlight issues of health and hygiene through language with a view to developing communicative competence and communication skills through a variety of participatory learning skills. Ultimately it is about asking the question: How do I as a teacher teach literature skills better? How do I develop grammar skills better? How do I use group work to optimise language acquisition skills?*

Tracy's reluctance to make direct links between literacy and PHASE is once again a consequence of two influences. First is her insistence that she is "not a language person", despite the programme having evolved out of an intuitive understanding of the necessity to:

*... develop English language skills in practical ways to enable learners to learn the language in a contextually real and relevant way, rather than through the more abstract and disembodied way that language is often taught.*

Secondly, it is influenced by an intuitive sense that:

*While the focus of the programme is primarily to develop English language skills, we are reluctant to force this component into the English language curriculum because we do not want the language issues to impede the social development goals of the programme. But we find that it is predominantly English language teachers who attend our workshops.*

These discourses reveal a dialectical process of how an individual's lay ontology, in dialogue with field experience, informs her practice, which in turn becomes inscribed



into the organisation's routines. The value of this mode of curriculum development is that it involves a 'bottom up approach, responding to real, *in-situ* problems, rather than the pedantic massified solutions favoured by some funders, as articulated by Tracy:

*The programme focuses on such important real life issues rather than contrived, hypothetical scenarios often found in textbooks... When you deal with these complex and complicated issues, you are sensitised to the problems beyond the school, in the communities, such as the problem of access to water and cultural issues...*

In acknowledging the social context as paramount in conceiving of literacy, the PHASE programme transports literacy beyond the conventional notion of a set of discrete formal skills learnt in formal education, but as "social practices embedded in specific contexts, discourses and positions" (Prinnsloo & Brier, 1996: 3). Interestingly, the PHASE programme is an intuitive expression of the philosophy of the new literacy movement advocated by Street (1989, 1993, 1995); Gee, (1990) and Prinnsloo & Brier (1996). This notion challenges the imposition of an idealised 'standard' variety of literacy (usually derived from the Western canon) and demands instead, that we confront the question of which particular kinds of literacy are important for those deemed "illiterate" by conventional notions of literacy.

In summary, the relative success of PHASE may be ascribed to two complimentary influences. Firstly, it evolved out of Tracy's intuitive desire not to train learners to "be good toilet cleaners" but to challenge the power dynamics associated with patriarchal societies. The realisation by boys that the responsibility for hewing water was not the preserve of girls is the first step towards emancipation; a giant leap towards eroding discriminatory practices. The other significant influence is her ability to exercise her agency by eliciting the support and services of what Tracy refers to as "organic intellectuals" (Brownlee, 1998:35). The Gramscian notion of organic intellectual is a reference to the individuals within a society who emerge 'organically' from within social groups; who help the group gain awareness of its economic social and political function, an essential condition for emancipatory potential to be realised. For Tracy, it is people such as Londiwe (one of the trainers on PHASE) who give substance to the emancipatory potential of the project; and Cecil Fynn (the coordinator of the tree planting project) with his simple but profound conception of the 'unloved school'; and Cheron Verster (the projects manager and materials developer) with her rich storehouse of knowledge that grew out of years with development work in rural communities. ELET, as an institution, may be said to personify the organic intellectual that was borne to provide direction at a time when there were few route maps for language teaching in de-centred communities. While finding new routes to overcome systemic and attitudinal obstacles, it chose to negotiate the obstacles rather than avoid them, sometimes allowing itself to be shaped by the route it took, at other times vigorously pursuing alternative routes. These organic intellectuals have an obligation to craft their lay ontologies more systematically and rigorously to enable their valuable work to enjoy legitimacy as research and to influence policy.

#### 5.4.7. Concluding comments

In this section, I have attempted to interrogate ELET's espoused emancipatory curriculum using a critical literacy evaluation framework. Through a design and policy analysis of selected curriculum documents and members discourses, It is evident that

ELET's teacher development programme, grounded in the principles of Communicative Language Teaching, is responsive to Curriculum 2005, transcends the limitations of conventional CLT practice and gives substance to the policy of multilingualism. One of the reasons for the success of the programme is that, unlike courses imported from the 'West', ELET's curriculum is 'home-grown', and has its roots in its health and environment programmes that are sensitive to how social contexts enable or inhibit language learning. I conclude that, given the necessary systemic support, the programme has the potential to realise its emancipatory intent. The Programme for Health and Sanitation, which was identified earlier as ELET's agentic response to isomorphism, is also an expression of the role of organic intellectuals articulating their lay ontologies in development work, and holds promise for a reconceptualised role for NGOs as sites of research-production in the new millennium. It is perhaps the absence of a research culture in ELET that is a crucial missing dimension in its mutation, and one that prevents it from enjoying legitimacy as an agency of knowledge-production. The following section will highlight, briefly, some of the more obvious limitations of the organisation's strategic responses to the changing development environment.

## Section E

### 5.5 Riptides of Opportunity<sup>67</sup>

*"Everything flows and nothing abides; everything gives way and nothing stays fixed...cool things become warm, the warm grows cool; the moist dries, the parched becomes moist...It is in changing that things find repose"*

*Heraclitus, 500 B.C.*

#### 5.5.1 Introduction

Citing the work of the theoretical physicist David Bohm, Morgan (1986:233), alludes to Bohm's theory that portrays the world as an unfragmented wholeness. Like Heraclitus, above, Bohm views process, flux, and change as fundamental, as having an *implicate (or enfolded)* order distinguished from an *explicate (or unfolded)* order. Bohm argues, "the latter realises and expresses potentialities existing within the former" (Morgan, 1986:233). The implicate order is viewed as a creative process, which has everything enfolded in everything else, and which provides the generative forms of explicate forms. These forms, Morgan argues, like the river described by Heraclitus, have the appearance of stability while being underpinned by flux and change. All organisations have the capacity to create identities of one form or another, for "in many respects, the process of organising is the realisation of an identity" (ibid.: 245). As organisations assert their identities, they can initiate major transformations in the social ecology to which they belong, they can precipitate their own demise by their reticence, or they can create conditions that will allow them to evolve along with the environment. While it is difficult for an organisation to relinquish an identity that has rewarded it with success in the past, it is precisely the need to relinquish this identity in the context of an evolving environment that can enable it to survive.

One of the reasons cited by organisational theorists for the self-perpetuating entities of organisations is their tendency to have a fixed notion of who they are and what they can be. Morgan (1986) refers to this organisational geocentricism, where organisations tend to impose or sustain identity at all costs. Such organisations overemphasise their own importance, underplaying the significance of the wider system of relations in which they exist. However, to suggest that ELET is an egocentric organisation is to overlook the significance of its having survived a climate that many other NGOs have not. Its survival is as much a consequence of its resilient identity, as its ability to make strategic reconfigurations as the environment demanded. In relation to other language development NGOs, ELET's strength has been its capacity to innovate rather than

<sup>67</sup> I borrow this metaphor from Johnstone (1994), who argues that while tides have a predictable, causal explanation, riptides are more complicated. A riptide is a current of water that flows counter to the dominant tide. One may see the presence of the tide on the surface, but the power of the tide is underneath. The causes are a combination of rising tide, offshore wind and a pronounced sandbar. Johnstone explains that the effect of wind and tide is to push the water behind the sandbar where it is trapped, resulting in two contradictory forces: One is of the wind pushing the water up the beach, the other of the trapped water attempting to return. If a portion of a sandbar were to give way, the water begins to flow like a river below the dominant tide. Johnstone's metaphor captures the dilemma between the dominant legitimating practices and ideologies that sustain an organisation, and the dynamic latent energies beneath organisational structures that agitate for change.

replicate. Yet, while ELET's innovation has the potentiality for success, it is in itself an insufficient condition for its continued sustenance. I want to argue, in this section, that in its attempt to preserve its 'idealised'<sup>68</sup> identity as a language development NGO, ELET has squandered opportunities to exploit the potential benefits accrued from its innovation. Furthermore, the absence of a **long term strategic vision** denied the organisation the capacity to harness the many benefits its work offered.

### 5.5.2. Re-Searching Identity

In both sections A and B, I portray ELET as a dynamic, creative and productive organism. Its dynamism derives from its capacity to be responsive to emerging opportunities in the organisational field, while its productivity is expressed in the diversity of its programme offerings, particularly its reconceptualisation of language literacy. However, its dynamism and productivity have been undermined by its failure to respond to crucial strategic imperatives, among them, the absence of a marketing and public relations culture, an inadequate focus on its research potential, and its reluctance to reconceptualise its identity in line with its expanded sphere of influence in the development field. In particular, it has been reluctant to bring the "otherised" environment and health projects (which constitutes the mainstay of its work) into the centre of its focus.

One of the most unfortunate inadequacies that has resulted in the diminution of its status as an influential NGO is that it has undermined the value of its groundbreaking activities over the past two decades, by not sufficiently documenting its work as research in action. Hence, it has lost the opportunity to theorise its innovations to give it legitimacy and currency. In its defence, ELET argues that there was simply no opportunity to infuse a research dimension because every available staff member has always been optimally involved in service provision and there was no time or energy to focus on reflective practice. However, individuals within the organisation, the director in particular, will not deny that there was a time in its history when such an enterprise was possible, but they failed to capitalise on it and consequently were not able to enculturate its members with a research ethic.

ELET has been a prolific producer of curriculum materials for various phases, levels and programmes. In the early eighties, ELET advocated a variety of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which responded to the contextual realities of South African education. CLT, which was at that stage marginal to the departments of education, was to become mainstream in the years to come. Many of these materials have been appropriated by other NGOs, universities and education departments since then. ELET has failed to make appropriate legal provisions for these products, which comprises its intellectual capital. Hence, ELET is powerless to act when the return it receives on its investments is disproportionate to its real value.

Perhaps one of its greatest weaknesses has been ELET's failure to give its many innovative programmes prominence in the public domain. Whereas in the eighties and nineties, ELET was a respected 'brand' in schools throughout the province, it appears to

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<sup>68</sup> I have argued elsewhere in this chapter, that some individuals within ELET view the organisation's mutation as a betrayal of the values underpinning its advent. Hence, they see the language development component as central to the organisation's mission, despite the threat that this component, rendered unprofitable by a changing higher education sector, can no longer sustain the organization.



have become smug about its status in the nineties. Its failure to institute an effective marketing and public relations strategy means that it is no longer a 'visible' organisation, despite its effectiveness. Unlike most development initiatives whose impact is often intangible or invisible, ELET's work has material presence. Its PHASE and School's Greening Project are just two programmes that have affected school environments significantly and in tangible ways, but the success of these efforts remains an untold story.

### Synthesis of Chapter 5

This chapter has attempted to answer two critical questions, namely, what influences shape the identity of a language development NGO in a transitional democracy, and what contribution ELET has made to language development. Conceived originally as a counter-hegemonic agency for language development, the organisation's capacity to preserve its philanthropic mission is systematically undermined by the coercive, mimetic and normative pressures of the corporate funder, forcing the organisation to adopt a mode of professionalisation, which is in conflict with the values of its members. The idealism of members within the organisation is counterbalanced by the reality of globalisation manifest in the pragmatism of its chairperson, a higher education policy process that promotes academic insularity and the demand for empiricist reporting mechanisms that impede meaningful development. The troubled identities of members grappling with the experience of mutation alerts to the significance of emotions in the workplace as predictors of productive environments, and that while an NGO is ideally a self-destructing entity, it does contain the mechanisms for self-perpetuation, which further undermines its philanthropic potential. Notwithstanding its vulnerability, however, NGOs do possess the potential for agency over constraint. For ELET, its agency is its curriculum.

In evaluating ELET's curriculum against its espoused emancipatory philosophy, it emerges that the organisation has made a significant contribution to language development through its teacher development courses and its health and environment projects. Its environment and health programmes in particular have the ingredients of a "revolutionary pedagogy" (McLaren, 1999). However, while it has fundamentally reconceptualised language literacy in potentially emancipatory ways, its capacity to influence policy is undermined by the failure of the organisation to reinvent itself as an institute for research production, but that it is precisely its potential as a site for alternative research production that could offer it a lifeline from its present debilitating crisis, enabling it to contribute significantly to teacher development in the future.

## Chapter 6

### An Archaeological Glimpse at NGO Identity in South Africa

#### 6.1 Introduction

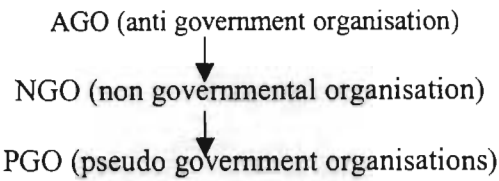
Non-government organisations (NGOs) in sub-Saharan Africa have acquired the reputation of being service-providers and conduits of foreign aid (see Maclure, 2000). This has led to allegations that the non-governmental sector has been co-opted by the neo-liberal, New Policy Agenda of international development assistance, reinforcing the hegemony of foreign donors and African elites. Khamsi, (1998: 1) elaborates:

*They [NGOs] become institutionalised, mainstreamed, and dependent on external funding. In sum, the apotheosis of NGOs and GROs (Grass Roots Organisations) as disguised state functionaries and administrators of official aid has created the following result: the very foundation on which NGOs and GROs have been built - smallness, community orientation, efficiency, political activism - is in danger of crumbling. NGOs have not only gained momentum, increased in number and size, become institutionalised, mainstreamed, and dependent, but also, as critics point out, have become co-opted and corrupted by their external funders.*

The arguments above contain some of the commonsenses that have come to colonise the world of the non-profit organisation. These commonsenses derive largely from **macro level** studies and analyses of the New Policy Agenda, which gives renewed prominence to the role of NGOs in the development of civil society. These studies focus, among other issues, on the agendas of bilateral and multilateral donor agencies like the World Bank, USAID, and the British Overseas Development Administration (ODA). This agenda has the primary aims of (1) strengthening civil society for the purposes of achieving political pluralism and democratic forms of governance; and (2) achieving greater efficiency by subjecting social programs to market forces (Arnove, and Christina, 1998), see also (McKinstry, 1991; Edwards and Hulme, 1996; Taylor, 1997). In this typology, the alliance between the NGO, the state and corporation triad has been portrayed as an unholy one with the existence of contestational relationships between different permutations at different times in history. For instance, in the pre-1994 era in South Africa, the NGO was cast as the authentic voice of resistance against an illegitimate state. The corporate sector offered tacit support to the NGO movement while strategically preserving a cordial relationship with the state. In the post 1994 era, the permutation has once again changed. In recent times, it is argued; the corporate world has abandoned its former ally in the NGO, as the corporate sector seeks to buffet itself against the impact of globalisation.

In this trajectory the NGO has seen a shift from its role as counter-hegemonic force, to one that has mutated to evince a corporate identity, to one co-opted by the state as an agency for service delivery. As agents of delivery, they are caricatured as unequal partners with the state, and in some instances collusive surrogates. Represented

schematically, the trajectory looks something like this:



How does this trajectory resonate with ELET’s lifehistory? The data produced in this biography has enabled a **micro-level** interrogation of the organisation’s complex mutating identity as it negotiates the macro influences that continue to impinge on its identity, with consequences not always evident, given the limitations of the methodology used in this study. However, the data does reveal a startling similarity in ELET’s trajectory in relation to the trajectory of the global NGO movement portrayed by macro analysts. This trajectory, capturing two decades of ELET’s history may be represented in the table below:

**Table 10: Two decades of ELET: From Resistance to Reconstruction - 1985-2002**

<i>Phase</i>	<i>ELET characterised by:</i>
<p><b>1: The Dispersion Phase</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NGO as a covert counter hegemonic force</li> <li>• Covert, non-contestational challenge to apartheid education and mainstream curriculum</li> <li>• Alternative agency for skills development</li> <li>• Surrogate of Corporate funder- conduit for social conscience funds</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Micro level site based intervention for language professional development</li> <li>2. Goals vaguely defined: relative flexibility in curriculum design to challenge Bantu Education</li> <li>3. Intervention modelled on Zambian influence supported by academic/theoretical knowledge</li> <li>4. Infusion of a sociolinguistic focus into sterile language curriculum</li> </ol>
<p><b>2: The Diversification Phase</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Changing political climate: The rise of democracy and the legitimisation of the state</li> <li>• Changing imperatives of donors and funders: the desire to strengthen the hand of the state</li> <li>• Changing development imperatives of the fledgling democracy-its quest for legitimisation</li> <li>• The quest for organisational relevance: redefining developmental orientation</li> <li>• Changing conceptions of literacy</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Expansion and elaboration in scope of goals: more specific goals, objectives, incremental pursuit of goals:</li> <li>2. Embracing whole school development as the defining principle of development</li> <li>3. Expansion of sphere of influence: from micro to macro</li> <li>4. New organisational structure and culture</li> <li>5. Participation in new state policies</li> <li>6. Institutionalising Project for Health And Sanitation Education.</li> </ol>
<p><b>3: Consolidation Phase: The Quest for Survival</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• From NGO to PGO (Pseudo Governmental Organisation) - from agency for curriculum reconstruction to agency for service delivery</li> <li>• Funders demand for bureaucratic accountability and professionalisation</li> <li>• The impact of "professionalisation" on ELET's social mission</li> <li>• Corporatisation of organisation behaviour and its impact on management styles</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The shift from humanitarianism to economic rationality</li> <li>2. Curriculum 2005/21- liberalisation of language curriculum (LLC)</li> <li>3. Dilution of substantive elements of language pedagogy</li> <li>4. Strategic courtship of the corporate and state as clients</li> <li>5. Mimetic, coercive and normative isomorphic influences to organisational structure</li> </ol>

The emerging trends in this table raise several interesting questions about ELET's identity: What are the consequences of ELET's mutation? Has it mutated from one recognisable form into another recognisable form? Is that recognisable form reminiscent of something familiar outside of its own purview? How has it come to acquire that familiar form?

The study has proceeded with a macro-analysis of the NGO sector in an attempt to provide a contextual landscape for a micro-analysis of ELET's mutating identity to explain the behaviour of an NGO in a transitional democracy. I wish now to attempt an



exploration of the above questions by adopting an intermediate **meso-analysis**, which provides an interface between the macro-sociological explanations of mutation, (focusing largely on the pervasive influence of globalisation), with micro-level explanations of individual responses to such mutations. A meso-level analysis allows one to acknowledge that institutions are active agencies with the capacity to adapt to changes experienced by individuals (micro-level), as well as the capacity to respond to societal changes (macro-level). More precisely, these institutions react to and generate political, economical, ecological and other social changes that in turn craft their identities (Khamisi, 1998).

In this section, we explore the impact of the global revolution on the identity of a language development NGO, examining the contradictory demands it faces. On one hand, the NGO is expected to be responsive to local development imperatives. On the other, it is expected to remain responsive to the language of strategic managerialism, the language of the global economy. Appropriating the theory of Isomorphism, which I alluded to in the last chapter, I attempt to explain how ELET has come to acquire its “familiar” character. As a counterpoint, this section argues that such macro level analyses tend to be reductionist, ignoring the organisation’s potential for agency and the capacity to subvert the natural progression towards isomorphism by reinventing itself to become contextually relevant. In the last chapter, I drew on Giddens’ (1983) theory of Structuration, which offers a challenge to the theory of isomorphism, to argue that NGOs possess the necessary agency to resist the coercive power of the corporate by appropriating an antithetic principle of isomorphism: i.e. the courage to innovate rather than replicate.

Through a critical document analysis of ELET’s curriculum, in the last chapter, we observed that ELET’s contribution to language development is an expression of its creative agency. In this chapter, I want to extend the argument by suggesting that this expression of agency constitutes an important reconfiguration of the organisation’s potential as an alternative agency for research production and curriculum reform, which has significant implications for a mutating higher education sector. However, I will also argue that for agency to have force and legitimacy, it needs to move beyond arbitrary disembodied responses to episodic opportunities in the development arena. Instead, it requires a fundamental reorientation of an organisation’s identity, which values flexibility and transience rather than the preservation of an idealised identity.

## **6.2 Post-modernity, NGOs and the Global Economy**

It is perhaps true that the globalization discourse has become an “irresistible mantra of our time” (Govinden, 2001), and it is necessary to be wary of what Harvey (1996) calls ‘globaloney’ – that the ‘globalization thesis’ can be used to explain almost anything and everything, especially since it is ubiquitous in current policy documents and policy analyses (Ball, 2001). However, a persistent question that frequently plagues scholars is whether Africa’s submission to the global network is inevitable, and in fact desirable if the continent is to be extricated from the “black holes of informational capitalism” (Castells, 2001:237); or whether Africa has the luxury of “thinking global and acting local” (ibid.) by insulating itself from the coercive forces of the global economy, charting its own research agendas to achieve its cherished goals of equity and social justice. Another question that requires some attention is: in a context where no community is immune to the effects of the global revolution, (changing the fundamentals of human

relations and social life), is the notion of "local" still relevant? (See Carnoy, 2000). This question is particularly pertinent when one considers the work of NGOs as alternative agencies of research production, charged with executing local development initiatives. What impact is the new "global speak" having on the identity and work of NGOs?

NGOs, like higher education systems globally are called upon to reconfigure their identities to address or redress local imperatives (see Moja and Cloete, 2001). This call reverberates through Teboho's discourses as she argues for an environmentally responsive organisation with fluid agendas. In the same breath, development professionals, academics and intellectuals are implored to imbibe the new globalised "managerial language of strategic planning, students as clients, core business, outsourcing, cost centres and privatisation" (ibid.: 249). Moja and Cloete argue that while academics (and developmental agencies) still possess the moral courage to pursue local agendas, globalisation will not leave them alone, either in the way their workplaces are being reorganised, or through rival institutions touting their students through the Internet. Castells, (2001:213) highlighting the dilemma, suggests that "the intellectual and personal drama of some of the best college professors in the third world is that in order to pursue their academic endeavour, they had to be closely linked to the university system in the dominant countries, thus denying to some extent their cultural identity and taking the risk of being rejected by their own societies and considered alien to their problems and struggles". The contradictions between academic freedom and political militanism, as well as the drive for modernisation and preservation of cultural identity, have been the fundamental cause for the loss of the best academic talent in most developing countries (ibid.). Closely tied to this is that the restructuring of South African state organs is mirrored in higher education institutions. Institutions are expected to be open to competition and responsive to market forces while remaining sensitive to pragmatic realities of reconstruction and social justice; resembling something of the "policy primeval soup" (Kingdom, 1984), with a particularly insipid flavour.

"Whether we are hypo-globalists who believe in the pervasive and inevitable influence of globalisation, or globalisation sceptics, who would rather opt for regionalism, or whether we hover somewhere between globalisation and localisation, -"glocalisation" (Czariawska, 2002), we cannot deny its immanence" (Govinden, 2000:1). What then are the implications for local research agendas and local research agencies, if the discourse on globalisation is predicated on this commonsense of inevitability? Jansen (2000: 5), concerned less with "what globalisation is than what it does" suggests that one of the inevitable consequences of this shift is that "universities across the world, at about the same time, tend to do more or less the same things, using more or less the same language" (ibid.: 5). Hence, he adds, "quality assurance, mergers, performance and productivity, restructuring... have generated a powerful and pervasive discourse on campuses. What makes organisations so similar?

I wish to engage with this question by extending the reference to higher education to include the work of NGOs engaged in education development in South Africa, exploring whether they too have submitted to the inevitable, pervasive influence of globalisation, evaluating the impact this has had on their identities, as well as their capacity to service their "local" clientele while negotiating the impact of global forces. As elucidated in chapter one, NGOs occupy a space also known as the 'Third Sector' in a given country or society and its relations with the other sectors are presumed to be determined, to a considerable extent, by the particularities of that country or society (e.g., type of rule,



history, political culture) (Salamon and Anheier 1996 in Gurion and Katz, 1998). From a socio-political perspective, one of the functions of the Third Sector is to link, and alternately serve as a buffer between, government and its citizens. It is this function that is covered by the notion of civil society, a term denoting the many political, social, religious and ideological associations mediating between the individual and state. In their mobilization of resources to challenge power structures, they are, in essence, counter-hegemonic agents (Routledge 1993 in Gurion and Katz, 1998). Theories of the Third Sector then, address macro-economic and public policy implications of this domain's activity. Because NGOs are inherently political, in that they seek to alter or transform the prevailing set of socio-political conditions, they may be considered a form of social movement that focuses on ideology, collective identity, and attitudes of members, particularly with respect to prevailing power relations in society. Does this caricature encapsulate the identity of the modern day NGO in a transitional democracy?

Evidently not! The data generated in this study reveals significant incongruities in ELET's identity in relation to the classical conception of NGO identity. In an attempt to explain the *de facto* identity of ELET, and perhaps of other NGOs in the country, I use selected vignettes and snapshots from the institutional biography, to demonstrate that in a rapidly globalising economic climate, NGOs are subject to isomorphic pressures and forced to mimic the institutional cultures of their 'bigger brother' donors if they are to survive and remain relevant to their intended missions. In the last chapter, we provided a brief theoretical exposition to isomorphism which Meyer and Rowan (1977) and DiMaggio and Powell (1983) propose as the "master bridging process in institutional environments: by incorporating institutional rules within their own structures, organisations become more homogeneous, more similar in structure, over time" (primarily within a particular institutional environment and context). I attempt to provide an empirical elaboration on these propositions in this chapter, exploring the extent to which it has infiltrated the identity of ELET, and how it has impacted ELET's mission.

### 6.3 The influence of Isomorphism on NGO Identity<sup>69</sup>

Organisational structure, which traditionally arises from the rules of efficiency in the marketplace, now arises from the institutional constraints imposed by business, the state and the professions. The efforts to achieve rationality with uncertainty and constraint lead to homogeneity of structure (institutional isomorphism). Isomorphism is a "constraining process that forces one unit in a population to resemble other units that face the same set of environmental conditions". DiMaggio and Powell (1983) distinguish between Coercive Isomorphism that stems from political influences and the problem of legitimacy; Mimetic Isomorphism resulting from responses to uncertainty, and Normative Isomorphism associated with professionalisation. DiMaggio and Powell suggest that the typology is analytic: the types are not always empirically distinct.

#### 6.3.1 ELET, A product of Coercive Isomorphism?

Earlier studies by organisational theorists on the institutional effects on individual organisations emphasise the coercive influence of institutional forces as a precondition for obtaining resources. In this view, organisations were seen to be submissive to these

<sup>69</sup> For an elaboration of this argument see Dhunpath, R., (2002) An archaeological glimpse at NGO identity in South Africa, Journal of Education, Vol. 28, 2002, UND, South Africa.



impositional tendencies, because, failure to do so would be construed as “normative approbation” (Scott, 1995:114). However, the limitation with this position is that it does not account for the strategic responses of individual organisations. One form of strategic response involves organisations decoupling their structures in such a way that they “wear” the imprinting of institutionalisation but utilize a range of strategic responses available to them. Oliver (1991, in Scott, 1995:128) identifies five general strategies: *acquiescing, compromising, avoiding, defying, and manipulating*. Which of these strategies does ELET appropriate to what effect?

DiMaggio and Powell (1983: 147) contend that the “engine of rationalization and bureaucratisation has moved from the competitive marketplace to the state and the professions”. Once a set of organisations emerges as a field, a paradox emerges: rational actors make their organisations increasingly similar as they try to change them. Formal and informal pressures are exerted on organisations by other organisations upon which they are dependent, as well as by cultural expectations from society. Some are governmental mandates; some are derived from contract law, and some by financial reporting requirements. “Organisations are increasingly homogeneous within given domains and increasingly organised around rituals of conformity to wider institutions” (ibid.). Hence, large corporations can have similar impact on their subsidiaries and the institutions that rely on them for their survival. To illustrate this trend, and its particular impact on ELET, I turn to excerpts from interviews with a donor representative on issues of institutional autonomy in relation to funders and the state:

*The grant-making sector in general has changed dramatically. Corporate donors are becoming circumspect about how and to whom they disburse their funds. For instance, a civil engineering company questions the logic of funding early childhood development when its own human resource needs are not being addressed. They are now saying, let's drop all funding unrelated to civil engineering, and focus on training skilled civil engineers. By the time the engineering company funds the various sectors associated with developing skilled engineers, there are no funds for an institution like ELET with its focus on language development even though language development is in itself a crucial component of development. Perhaps we should examine the history of AngloVaal (AV) to illustrate the point I am making. There was a time when AV was a corporation with multiple interests including mining, steel, glass, food and rubber. It was quite common for one of the subsidiaries to cross-subsidise the other when the markets were unfavourable. In the nineties when the gold markets were in decline, there were voices in AV who said that they had always bounced back with the help of subsidiaries and they would bounce back again. What was happening on the outside was that the investor was speaking with a different voice. The investor was beginning to question why she should lock her investment in one corporate venture that used its profits to cross-subsidise another less profitable venture. It therefore made sense for investors to place their interests in dedicated companies that did not have to manage the baggage of multiple subsidiaries. It took a family corporate giant seventy years to make the painful decision to restructure and unbundle. The new AV is a product of that new rationality which requires companies to focus on their operations, be mindful of their limitations, and exploit their potential within the confines of their resources. This is not peculiar to AV. The majority of corporates internationally have gone through this experience. Anglo American has done it. Billitin has done it. It's*



*about exercising a few basic business principles: prune what you don't need, acknowledge that there are limitations to what you are able to handle and temper your dreams with the reality that NGOs will increasingly have to operate on the same principles as successful business.*

The above transcript raises a range of crucial issues relating to the impact of resource dependency on institutional identity and the coercive potential of funders who hold the resources. A significant feature of the above discourse is the rational, naturalised, taken-for-granted manner in which the funder's agenda is legitimated. Vaara, and Tienari (2002), regard this as a *rationalistic* discourse, which is usually the dominant discourse under which other discourses are subordinated. For instance, what is essentially corporate self-interest is portrayed as universal logic. What is also significant here is that this rationalistic discourse provides a framework wherein mergers and acquisitions are relatively easily justified as necessary business manoeuvres. The consequent moral and ethical implications of managerial actions are silenced as the discourse is legitimised as 'the only way'.

*These discourses portray mergers and acquisitions on managerial terms as necessary steps to improve strategic positioning (as in the competitiveness variant) and/or to increase the cost-efficiency of operations (as in the rationalization variant). Within this discursive framework, personnel or human resource concerns are easily subordinated to the primary rhetoric. If broader social or societal concerns are given specific attention, they are usually labelled 'unfortunate but unavoidable.'*

(Vaara and Tienari, 2002:21).

This rationalistic discourse is usually controlled by managerial actors, in this case, the development consultant acting in her capacity of chair of the ELET board. This, Vaara and Tienari suggest, is not surprising since a quest for progress and rationality is an inherent part of the management institution itself. However, this analysis also suggests that the managerial ability to control both the discursive practices and content of the discussions is also related to the technologization<sup>70</sup> of this discourse (Fairclough, 1997: in *ibid.*: 21).

Meyer and Rowan (1977) argue that as rationalised states and other large rational organisations expand their dominance over more arenas of social life, organisational structures increasingly come to reflect rules institutionalised and legitimated by and within the state. As a result, organisations are increasingly homogeneous within given domains and increasingly organised around rituals of conformity to wider institutions. What is evident in the above transcript is a coercive imposition of 'standard' operating procedures and legitimated rules in much the same way, as a corporation would impose on its subsidiary. In essence, AngloVaal is saying to ELET: 'we are changing our corporate culture in response to global realities. We have realigned our institutional

<sup>70</sup> Vaara & Tienari suggest that technologisation of discourses focuses on the central role of texts, metaphors, dramas, conversations, narratives and stories in particular in legitimizing mergers. Seminal studies have illustrated that discourses should not be understood only as reports or accounts of 'organizational reality'. These discourses are an inherent part of the social construction of organizations, organizing, management and managing. Discourses are part of organizational action; they (re)define what is justified and legitimate.

structure in line with international trends. If you want us to continue funding you, you will have to change too'. DiMaggio and Powell (1983: 151) observe from an analysis of charities in the USA during the 1930's that as conglomerates increase in size and scope, they subject subsidiaries to certain standardized reporting mechanisms, such as accounting procedures, performance evaluations and budgetary plans compatible with policies of the parent corporation. It was observed in the last chapter how the coercive pressures evident here were complemented by the constraining reporting mechanisms demanded by Northern international donors. Collectively, these coercive pressures impact significantly on the capacity of the organisation to remain focussed on its espoused missions.

ELET's strategic response to coercion has been varied, but generally concomitant to the reward to be derived from the specific response. For the major part however, the general spirit of the organisation has been characterised by acquiescence and compromise rather than avoidance, defiance or manipulation. To illustrate this I turn my attention to the accounting structures and reporting mechanisms that evolved over the years. There was a time when such structures were superfluous since ELET was merely a surrogate of the core funder, as Mervin recollects:

*The infrastructure had already been set up before I got there. AV provided the office space and paid the salaries. Funds were never a problem. They administered the accounts, and provided monthly variance reports. ELET was completely dependent on AV. We shared office space with the bread/biscuit company called Bakers LTD, which was a subsidiary of AV, and we enjoyed all of the privileges and comforts of a corporate giant.*

Mervin was happy to acquiesce to the funder's prescriptions for conformity to corporate norms. He did this for pragmatic reasons:

*I felt somewhat uncomfortable at this dependency but was not willing to challenge it because of the fear of losing the funding and scuttling the whole mission. Fortuitously, we converged on many issues and so the scope for confrontation was minimal.*

He rationalizes this acquiescence as a strategic response rather than as coercion:

*In any event, the dependency was never something that was flaunted and used to coerce us in any way. Neither did they make any attempt to micro-manage the organisation.*

However, when it became apparent that his position was being undermined, he responded with apparent defiance:

*...one of the trustees appointed by the Urban Foundation tended to want to micro-manage ELET. He was quite an influential trustee and we valued his contribution immensely, but he wanted to play a managerial role rather than that of oversight.... and I had my own little fights with him.*

Interestingly, the source of this conflict is related to a key ingredient of isomorphic tendency - competition. Organisations compete "not just for resources and customers, but

for political power and institutional legitimacy, for social as well as economic fitness" (Di Maggio and Powell, 1983:150). The trustee's desire to 'micro-manage' ELET can be ascribed as a strategic response to manage the potential for competition that ELET posed against the institution the trustee served as is evident in the following:

*There was one particular event, which was quite confrontational. At that stage, ELET was engaged in informal classroom-based interventions. SACHED invited us to offer a teacher development course that they were offering in Johannesburg and I was quite keen to offer it at ELET. Because it was a departure from the work we were doing, I approached the trustees for permission to offer the course. At that stage, I was not invited to the trustees' meetings so I had to depend on written reports and proposals. This trustee reported back that he had given the proposal his best shot, but that it was not approved. In, reality, though, it was he who had resisted the proposal because it would have meant that ELET was in competition with the institution he served.*

In what was evidently an act of unfair advantage, the trustee used his influence to coerce the board to maintain a conservative approach to development, even though the organisation had the capacity to diversify its development programmes. This was perhaps a prelude to the contestational relationships that ELET would find itself in, with other institutions of higher education when the environment became increasingly competitive. In this context, the NGO movement that was once strategically poised as a watchdog over government policy and the translation thereof, now finds itself looking increasingly towards establishing partnership with the provincial departments of education to counter the effects of its marginalisation from the higher education sector. This courtship with the 'state' poses several questions: is the NGO movement guilty of subverting the project of reconstruction by allowing itself to be co-opted by the state? Should the NGO movement remain aloof, representing the moral voice of civil society, or is this a naïve expectation that is anomalous with the spirit of a new democracy? Should the NGO in fact abandon its mission of being the critical voice and redirect its energies to strengthening the hand of the state? While there can be no definitive answers to these questions in the short term, it is true that their espoused projects of reconstruction, equity and social justice are potentially undermined as institutions such as ELET face the proverbial 'double-edged sword'. On the one edge, it has to contend with the coercive influence of the corporate funder and donor agencies, to conform to rationalised structures (see Mowjee, and Nyhei, 1998). On the other, ELET has to balance the peculiar roles of being counter-hegemonic agency as well as agency for service delivery. In the following excerpt (see chapter 3 for a full version), an ELET board member who enjoys considerable influence on ELET's institutional policy highlights the dilemma:

*The word "non" in NGO is predicated on the notion of a relationship of contestation and conflict between NGO and state. It is important that the 'non' be preserved as such, but there needs to be a fundamental shift in mindsets rather than dabble in cosmetic changes. There is a need to see the 'non' in NGO not as oppositional but as the alternative. If we conceive of the State, the NGO movement and civil society as occupying three separate boxes, then individuals within the NGO box need to reorientate themselves to recognise that if at one stage in their lives they faced north, they now perhaps need to start facing south. Actually, they need to recognise that they can longer have the luxury of facing in one direction only and that they will*

*have to constantly reconfigure themselves in flexible ways. There is no longer wisdom in simply adopting the either or binary: of being pro- or anti- government, it is about orienting oneself towards a goal directed delivery system modelled on successful business.*

Yet another implicit coercive influence is the funder's suggestion (through its development consultant) that ELET should abandon its confrontational role with the state and support the government in its initiatives. This appeal for a cooperative relationship with the state is indeed a compelling one and can hardly be challenged for its logic. However, the intention is not quite innocent. DiMaggio and Powell, (1983: 147) contend that the bureaucratisation and rationalisation of the corporation and the state have been achieved. This process, they argue, is effected largely by the state and the professions, both of which have become the great rationalisers of the second half of the twentieth century. They add that highly structured organisational fields provide a context in which individual efforts to deal with "rationality, uncertainty and constraint often lead, in the aggregate, to homogeneity in structure, culture and output." (Ibid.: 147). The call by business for collaboration between the state and its former adversary, the NGO, may be interpreted as the need for business to strengthen the hand of the state to enable it to preserve a secure economic and political environment in a context of global uncertainty.

However, not all isomorphic tendencies derive from coercive influences. In a climate of uncertainty, ambiguity and doubt, there is a powerful inclination for institutions to imitate seemingly successful models. DiMaggio and Powell (1983: 151) refer to this tendency as *Mimetic Isomorphism*.

### **6.3.2 Mimetic Isomorphism: When in Doubt, Imitate.**

When organisational goals are poorly understood (March and Olsen, 1976 in DiMaggio and Powell, 1983: 151), or when the environment creates "symbolic uncertainty" (ibid.), organisations model themselves on institutions that are perceived as successful prototypes. Institutionalists perceive uncertainty as a powerful engine that drives mimetic isomorphism, and is an important and potent force that encourages imitation that accords the organisation, and its activities, legitimacy.

However, apart from the more obvious influences that have characterised ELET's identity since 1983, more especially those associated with funding, there is no significant data to illustrate that ELET has attempted to mimic other organisations. Indeed, while mimetic isomorphism exerts a significant force for generative behaviour, it would be naïve to assume that institutions such as ELET are helpless victims of insurmountable coercive forces, pandering to the dictates of their richer cousins. The innovative ways in which some of the NGOs have faced the challenges brought by their relation with the state represents important lessons and contributions from the Third Sector to co-operation for social and economic development. Some of the NGOs studied have started to adopt strategies that nourish beneficiaries' involvement in a more sustainable manner (Raby, 1991, in Martínez, 1998). Others have adopted an internal participatory management style in order to facilitate external participation (Drabek, 1987; Clark, 1991; Raby, 1991 in Martínez, 1998). However, in other cases, some NGOs have decided to manage themselves in a rather hierarchical way as they feel it gives them more short-term and easy-to-report results (Avina, 1993, Martínez, 1998). They have become more "report-oriented" than "beneficiaries-oriented" as they feel they need donor support to



maintain themselves as organisations (Pearce, 1993, in Martínez, 1998). ELET's Primary Health and Sanitation Project which has been elucidated in the last chapter) is an example of an initiative for sustainable development born out of an environment of participatory management, where a real rather than an arbitrary problem is identified, a potential solution collaboratively negotiated with educators, learners and community members, and the solution collectively pursued. These programmes, involving a selected number of sites, are usually effectively managed and generate gratifying results (for an elaboration, see Tracy's comments in Chapter 3). However, as these initiatives increase in size and scope, another isomorphic characteristic finds space: Normative Isomorphism, which often sees organisations appropriating the services of consultants and specialists to manage the increasing diversity of emergent institutional demands, such as legal and accounting specialists. Meyer (1981) offers us a sobering reminder that mimetic processes are universal, its universality being credited to the increasing professionalization of institutions and the consequent infusing of *normative* pressures on institutional identity.

### 6.3.3 Normative Isomorphism: A Source of Institutional Legitimacy

DiMaggio and Powell (1983: 152), suggest that one important mechanism for encouraging normative isomorphism is the filtering of personnel. This occurs through the hiring of fast-track personnel who are able, as a result of their credentials, to socialise their colleagues into dominant organisational trends and practices. Inter-hiring between existing institutions also encourages isomorphism. People from the same educational backgrounds will approach problems in much the same way. Socialization on the job reinforces these conformities. The similarities caused by these processes allow organisations to interact with each other more easily and to build legitimacy among organisations. Often, as in the case of ELET, the members of advisory boards are represented on other boards with a similar orientation, entrenching the socialisation process and reinforcing the structural homogenisation. The following excerpt shows the consequence of an interesting phenomenon: the chair of ELET's advisory board is also the chair of the funder's (AngloVaal's) development wing.

*I believe in ELET's capacity as an NGO and its potential in making a contribution to the country, because of the many committed individuals within the institution. We cannot expect all members to have the same ideas on how the organisation should be run and I see this kind of dissent as healthy and desirable. We all bring different kinds of experiences to the organisation. The ideal is to bring those diverse ideas together so that something productive emerges. I am happy to say that we have that productive energy in ELET. As trustees we have had, despite our reluctance, to allow the organisation to take certain risks. For me there has to be a balance between taking risks and maintaining accountability and responsibility, and for this reason, I will continue to ask difficult questions, sometimes appearing to be conservative. Perhaps I have been influenced by my experiences in the business sector. Business does not take chances and risks unless it has measured the probability of success against a background of knowing the implications of failure. Together with this, we need to abandon the spirit of entitlement (which some NGO's are guilty of) and adopt a spirit of entrepreneurship where every individual within the organisation adopts a corporate ethic and works to promote the interest of the whole organisation rather than individual interests*

### 6.3.4 Predictors of Isomorphic Change

The above excerpt elucidates two key hypotheses that may be generalised as a predictor of isomorphic change: Firstly, "the greater the dependency of one organisation on another for its sustenance, the more similar it will become to that organisation in structure, climate and behavioural focus" (see DiMaggio and Powel, 1983: 154). The dependency syndrome introduces conventions that often increase homogeneity among structures (e.g. university departments). These conventions become "vocabularies of structure" (Meyer and Rowan, 1977). Organisations incorporate these cognitive belief systems because doing so enhances their legitimacy and hence increases their resources and survival capacities. (Scott, 1995:210). The second predictor of isomorphic tendencies implicit above is that the greater the reliance on credentialed managerial personnel, the greater the influence of these personnel on institutional structure and culture. In this context, it is significant to note that the triad of isomorphic pressures (coercive, mimetic and normative) are exerted in varying degrees by the same individual as a consequence of the strategic role s/he occupies in the institution.

In the last chapter, we explored the role of strategy as a discursive activity, which finds expression in the boardrooms and corridors of corporate empires and NGOs alike. We observed how ELET's strategic planning meeting (2001), revealed a subtle but decisive shift in certain members' discourses, where some individuals in the organisation have appropriated the econometric jargon of the funder, influenced to a significant degree by the language of the development consultant. To that extent, the isomorphic influences were real and even perhaps observable in the mutation of members' discourses. In this sense, therefore, the notion of isomorphism does not constitute an example of reductionism. However, it would be simplistic to conclude that the coercive discourses above are an example of blind capitalism, as we observe in Teboho's comments below.

### 6.4 Too Close For Comfort? The Impact of Official Aid on NGOs<sup>71</sup>

A central tenet of the non-government organisation, quite distinct from any other organisation in society, is voluntarism. In this respect, increasing dependence on official aid (both state and corporate) is perhaps inevitable, despite it being considered undesirable. In this context, Teboho's observation in "Vignettes" (p 28) is significant.

*The fact that it has been able to move out of its comfort zone is a giant leap for ELET. This is an achievement that needs to be celebrated and supported and nudged further, with the acknowledgement that ELET will never become fully self-sufficient. It is an NGO and NGOs by definition are not in a position to achieve self-sustaining profitability.*

ELET's pursuit of self-sufficiency may be regarded as an attempt to dilute the erosion of its legitimacy, that increasing reliance on official donor funding brings. As Van der Heijden (1987, p. 106, in Edwards and Hulme, 1998), quoting a traditional African proverb, puts it, "if you have your hand in another man's pocket you must move when he moves." In other words, it raises the simple question of whether it is possible to have an independent mission while relying on donor funds. Notwithstanding the role of *strategy as discourse* in generating (or hindering) the construction of new meanings and the enactment of particular strategies, in terms of its capacity to innovate, it was also

<sup>71</sup> Title borrowed from Edwards and Hulme (1996)

observed in chapter 5 that ELET has been effective in a broad range of programmes, notably the language development courses, the greening programme and the PHASE programme. However, as ELET becomes more involved in large-scale service provision, and relies more on funding from official donor agencies, organisational growth necessarily brings with it a higher level of bureaucracy. While it may be possible to manage growth successfully, the consequences of bureaucratisation are potentially destabilising to a non-profit's capacity for delivery. The acceptance of increasing amounts of donor funds, which usually come with complex (and often irrational) requirements for project appraisal, reporting, evaluation and accounting, presents NGOs (even the larger ones) with dilemmas about whether their obligation is to the constituencies they serve or to the funding agencies they are contracted to. Furthermore, the sense of instability and vulnerability is compounded by the donors' conditional prescriptions for service-delivery and the threat of withdrawal of funding if targets are not met. We have seen in Tracy's narratives in chapter 3, the consequences of the inordinate power that individuals within the funding industry have access to, and the potentially deleterious effect on the NGO when that power is used with impropriety.

Edwards and Hulme, in their thought-provoking paper appropriately entitled: "Too Close For Comfort? The Impact of Official Aid on Nongovernmental Organisations" (1996), ask whether the funding of NGOs to deliver pre-packaged services changes the nature of the relationship with donors from one of partnership, to one of contracting? They argue that the switch from partner to contractor constitutes a fundamental shift in the value base of the relationship. "The legitimacy of the NGO is no longer based upon values and voluntarism but on its contract to a legitimate agency" (*ibid.*). Furthermore, they argue that there are a deeper set of concerns about the possible "rewriting of the social contract" between government and its citizens as a result of NGO substitution for the state in key aspects of the development process, particularly the provision of services. The accountability of a non-elected NGO when providing services to "clients" is very different from the formal relationships between governments and citizens, giving rise to what Wood (1996, in Edwards and Hulme, 2002) has called "a franchise state", in countries such as Bangladesh. While ELET's development work with rural schools and communities is lauded as empowering, its success ironically masks the incapacity of the state and implicitly absolves it from responsibility for rural development. In this sense, ELET can no longer claim the role of counter-hegemonic force. Rather it might be argued that by substituting for the state through its health and environment programmes, ELET is complicit in perpetuating a pseudo-democratic state that has lost sense of its development imperatives.

A similar accusation might be levelled at Northern donors. Development analysts argue that donor benevolence is in fact a misnomer since the funder retains the power to infuse its own agendas structurally and ideologically on the identity of the NGO. Patterns of donor funding, which are invariably linked to macro-economic trends and global constructions of donor aid, often shape agendas on philanthropy. This is abundantly clear in the shifting discourses of the World Bank and the IMF in different periods of history. To illustrate this, one needs to interrogate the motives for the 'soft loan' programmes offered to developing countries in the 1970's and early 1980's. It would be easy to ascribe this as an act of philanthropy, but macro-economic hindsight reveals that these programmes were nothing more than an attempt to absorb excess liquidity in the first world markets, by exporting it to third world markets (Storey, 2000).

The normative power of donor aid does encourage NGOs with no mission other than the winning of donor or government contracts to succumb to the temptation towards

strategic compliance in order to attract donor funding. While such opportunistic behaviour may be frowned upon as unethical, it may be argued that it is a 'necessary evil' to enable NGOs to remain true to their missions. Individuals within ELET have resisted this temptation, but we have observed that such resistance emanates from individuals' ideological orientations rather than the innate capacity of the NGO to remain aloof from what is sometimes inevitable compliance for survival. Consequently, there is no guarantee that the successive generations of members at ELET, in the absence of consensual organisational values, in the context of an increasing dependency syndrome, will succeed in preserving its organisational autonomy.

A contrary (if not contradictory) argument is that because ELET has not been able to strategically manipulate the coercive prescriptions of the funder, particularly its reporting mechanisms, its legitimacy is undermined by a case of misplaced accountability. One of the more debilitating dilemmas faced by NGOs, (lucidly articulated by Tracy in chapter three), is that the work they do is qualitative and contingent (contingent upon a myriad of determinants beyond the control of the NGO). Furthermore, the tangible impact of such work is not always readily discernible or easily measurable in the short term, particularly if the objective is empowerment. Yet, as suggested by Teboho in chapter 3, without accurate ways of measuring performance, it is very difficult to be properly accountable to anyone. Edwards and Hulme suggest that NGOs have multiple accountabilities. They have to account "downwards" to their partners, beneficiaries, staff and supporters; and "upwards" to their trustees, donors and host governments; and perhaps horizontally as a result of their partnerships with the state. Multiple accountability invites the prospect of having to "overaccount" (because of multiple demands), or being able to "underaccount," as each overseeing authority assumes that another authority is taking a close look at actions and results. Hulme adds that "morally, and in terms of their wider claims to legitimacy, they are accountable to other constituencies, most obviously "beneficiaries" and contributors, but also to staff, for whom a real stake in the organisation is often an important *quid pro quo* for salaries, which are lower than their commercial sector counterparts". With regard to ELET, it is evident that its accountability is skewed to the most powerful constituency, the official donor agencies. How does one achieve the fine balance between transparent compromise and blind cooption (Eade, 1993, in Edwards, 1996); between professionalism and professionalisation; between accounting and accountability?

Development professionals like Tracy concede that the professionalisation of NGOs needs to happen, but not on the terms of the evidence-driven model that is presently demanded by funders. The tensions between bureaucratisation and professionalisation, a consequence of superimposing a narrow corporate economic rationality on the NGO, puts an inordinate amount of pressure on NGOs to satisfy bureaucratic/technocratic requirements as a means of accountability, in the process dislocating its centre of gravity. Yet, in order to survive as an NGO, it is required to submit to these coercive forces, as it cannot operate outside the corporate framework and since its survival depends on the benevolence of funders. The corporate funder argues that there is little evidence of the impact NGOs have had in the areas they serve, while NGOs such as ELET accuse funders of demanding a particular kind of professionalisation from NGOs; of being more concerned with bureaucratic 'bottom lines' than with real development indicators, which are not quantifiable by empiricist modes of evaluation.



How does one institute an alternate way of representing impact and influence more accurately and authentically? If it is argued that professionalisation is a necessary condition for the continuation of funding then it must first be conceded that the demand for empirical modes of evaluation is discordant with the developmental character of NGOs. The ideal solution would be to develop an alternative system of reporting that is not wholly evidence-based and technocratic in nature and which acknowledges that when evaluating social impact, using exclusively empiricist models can be reductionist.

### 6.5 Using the appropriate tool for the task

In excavating the identity of an NGO, with particular reference to ELET, I have appropriated the construct isomorphism as a theoretical tool to understand institutional change in transitional contexts. As it turns out, when the theory is applied to the data, it is not difficult to find approximate relationships and consonances to validate the theory. However, simply to map the theory against the data with the sole purpose of finding relationships is, in my opinion, a facile indulgence, a pursuit best left to hired evaluators who have often been accused of “telling the client what s/he wants to hear” so as to secure future contracts. Many of these evaluations are ostensibly scientific studies that use empiricist data, which is then couched into narratives to explain their actions and methods for supporting those narratives. Such accounts allow the NGOs to present multiple narratives to multiple funders in multiple worlds, using the same “product” (Star and Griesemer, 1989). Many of these narratives are patently dishonest and unethical. In reconfiguring its identity, the NGO needs to look more closely at itself, through the eyes of others who do not have a vested interest in the organisation, and who are not tempted to tell the client what s/he wants to hear just so as to secure future contracts.

If one adopts alternative modes of evaluation such as “illuminative evaluation”, which is located in the ethnographic, social anthropological domain (see Parlett and Hamilton: 1976) as a complementary lens to empiricist evaluation, it could serve to reconceptualise commonsense understandings of the professionalisation of NGOs. To this end, a strategic innovation would be for NGOs to court the funder by satisfying its demands for evidence-based evaluation data, while simultaneously engaging in more substantive qualitative impact analyses. Teboho’s call for “reflexive accountability” is particularly significant here. This, however, would have implications for NGOs’ already strained resources. It is vital, therefore, that ELET reconfigures its identity by exploiting its edge as a producer of contextually relevant research. **By redefining development work as research**, the strategic shift could have profound consequences for ELET. In the following section, I provide a rationale for why I think ELET is poised to make a significant contribution to research in higher education.

### 6.6 The Devil's Bargain: Educational Research and the Teacher

The last two decades have heralded some of the most significant advances in our thinking about learning and teaching. There is now virtually a universal consensus on the pivotal role of language in education, The Whole Language approach, and the emphasis on Writing Across the Curriculum, have been acknowledged as building blocks in their potential to mediate or inhibit learning. There has been a growing recognition in the disciplines of science and mathematics of the constructive nature of learning and the crucial importance of factoring into the learning process culture and context (Vithal,

involving actors and experts who move less according to the dynamics of their original disciplines and more according to problem interest". In other words, important intellectual problems are emerging in a context of application. Edwards (1996) argues that NGOs are unlikely to be able to find all the answers for themselves. For one thing, they have too many institutional interests that reduce their ability and willingness to "speak truth to power" (using Aaron Wildavsky's phrase). While NGOs possess the energies to generate creative and innovative interventions (which universities are rarely able to accomplish), they lack the research infrastructure, analytical skills, and large-scale investments required in learning and knowledge production. Yet, NGOs are forced by their vulnerable organisational structures to be on the cutting edge of skills, methodologies and delivery mechanisms. These advances are rarely supported by theory and are therefore not acknowledged as legitimate. Universities and the wider research community have a crucial role to play in capitalising on these skills and capacities, along with a more objective view of NGO successes and failures. It has been shown in this study that the hostile higher education policy environment makes foes of friends, and adversaries of potential allies, to the detriment of both. This is not an easy battle to overcome, but it is in the interests of both to revisit their antagonistic relationships.

Edwards cautions however, this must be a reflexive and reciprocal process: "we cannot change the world unless we understand how it works, but neither can we understand the way it works unless we are involved in some way with the processes that change it" (Edwards, 1989). NGOs do not want to be studied like animals in the zoo; they want to join hands with the research community in a common search for answers. As I have argued elsewhere in this thesis, it is essential to:

*...revisit the value of transdisciplinary research as a way of crossing paradigmatic borders, not merely as an academic indulgence, but to bring together different disciplines and theoretical-analytical frameworks into dialogue with each other in the hope of producing richer insights into ideology. We also see the prospect of how a dialogue between two disciplines and frameworks may lead to a development of both through a process of each internally appropriating the logic of the other as a resource for its own development...*

The future for both communities lies through co-working in which each offers the other something they do not have. Outside the insularity of academic disciplines, mode 2 knowledge production gains momentum. However, contrary to the usual tendency of dichotomising mode 1 and 2 knowledge as mutually exclusive, I am inclined towards Kraak's (2000) thesis that mode 2 knowledge production depends on a sound mode 1 disciplinary base, and that "mode 2 is not supplanting but rather supplementing mode 1, and indeed is an outgrowth of it" (Gibbons, 1998 in Kraak, 2000: 83). Kraak represents the characteristics of mode 2 knowledge in the following table.



Table 11: The Characteristics of Mode 1 and Mode 2 Knowledge (Kraak, 2000)

<b>Mode 1 Disciplinary Knowledge</b>	<b>Mode 2 Problem-Solving Knowledge</b>
<b>Disciplinarity</b>  Knowledge is formal and coded according to the canonical rules and procedures of academic disciplines	<b>Trans-Disciplinarity</b>  Knowledge is problem-oriented. It attempts to solve problems by drawing on multiple disciplines, which interact in real world contexts of use and application, yielding solutions as new knowledge which are not easily reducible too any of the participating academic disciplines.
<b>Homogeneous Production Sites</b>  The development of disciplinary knowledge has historically been associated with universities and other institutions of higher education. These institutions often exist in (ivory tower) isolation from real-world problems.	<b>Heterogeneous, trans-institutional production sites</b>  Knowledge is produced in multiple sites by problem-solving teams with members emanating from various institutions: Higher Education institutions, networking enterprises, R&D Laboratories, state S&T institutes, and NGO think tanks. Formal partnerships and joint ventures forged between these actors to generate new knowledge and exploit its commercial potential are common
<b>Insular Knowledge</b>  The only reference points for disciplinary knowledge are academic peers and the canonical rules and procedures internal to the academic discipline.	<b>Socially Useful Knowledge</b>  Many of the problems addressed by transdisciplinary and trans-institutional knowledge workers today are of great social importance or commercial value. This is socially accountable knowledge.

### 6.7 Nurturing a Community of Reason

The distinguishing feature of mode 2-knowledge is that it “is generated in the context of application, instead of being developed first, and applied to the context later” (Kraak, 2000: 14). Kraak adds that mode 2-knowledge production is organisationally diverse and heterogeneous, because it is the outcome of the endeavours of knowledge workers from diverse organisational backgrounds, in pursuit of innovation. Furthermore, mode 2 knowledge is heterogeneous because it employs “empirical and theoretical components; cognitive and non-cognitive elements in creative ways. As such, this transdisciplinarity potentially offers:

*...better theory, applied and refined in practice; and better practice, informed and tested against theory. In the process, NGOs and researchers can be co-creators of environments for learning that nurture both reflective practitioners and engaged academics. As Robert Arnove puts it in his paper, "this requires that we maintain our critical judgement" when we play this role-collaboration adds value to what each already has; it does not take away. But it does require more openness to working across boundaries, and different institutional structures and incentives. Neither NGOs nor universities have grasped this fundamental point. If they have*

*grasped it intellectually, they lack the courage and imagination to put it into practice. (Edwards, 1998).*

This kind of paradigm proliferation, which progressive NGOs embrace, (such as those inspired by the Freirean literacy projects) has a number of pristine advantages. Firstly, it has the potential to transcend the spurious binaries of theoretical and practical knowledges, and the equally spurious assumption that theoretical knowledge production is the preserve of universities while practical knowledge is the domain of 'other' agencies. It offers, potentially, a balance between the call for a utilitarian higher education to serve a social emancipatory agenda, and the demand that it continue its cerebral pursuit of 'pure' rather than instrumental reason (Higgs, 2002). This 'liberal' rationality (potentially) gives substance to Whagid's (2002) thesis of Complementarity where "knowledge for its own sake plus knowledge in the context of application" is the new pursuit of diverse scholars in diverse research sites (p20).

Such organisational diversity has the potential to promote a "**community of reason**" (Habermas, in Whagid, 2002: 23), that is, knowledge produced in the context of heterogeneity, transdisciplinarity and reflexive accountability. Such diversity potentially addresses the allegation that, "in-service teacher education is now concentrating severely on the practical demands of new legislation... research has had little influence... [and] advanced study of a systematic kind is now much reduced." (Goodson, 1993: 292). I use the notion of reason not in the empiricist mould of a dispassionate scientific truth, but as the pursuit of a rationality that does not easily imbibe the binarisms of "the old equals bad, and the new equals good" (Harley and Wedekind, 2002:5). Such a community of reason does not dismiss the quest for scientific truth with scorn; neither does it embrace the seductive tenets of progressive pedagogy uncritically. Instead, it is wary of the potential for foundationalism inherent in all academic discourses, and as a way towards infusing vigilance against foundationalism; it opens up spaces for alternative discourses by acknowledging the potential value of alternative agencies of knowledge production. Opening up these spaces gives NGOs like ELET the opportunity to be acknowledged as alternative agencies of knowledge production. This redefinition addresses another concern of this study: the effect of stability and permanence in an NGO's workforce (which is equally true of higher education institutions), which has the knock-on effect of academic and professional insularity. In an organisational context characterised by fluidity and permeability, mode 1 plus mode 2 knowledge-production "creates spaces to cultivate rational self understanding and communicative praxis" (Whagid, 2002: 24). In these contexts:

*teams of knowledge producers dissolve when a problem is solved or redefined. Members may then reassemble in different groups involving different loci, around different problems. Though problems may be transient and groups short-lived, the organisation and communication patterns persists as a matrix from which further groups and networks, dedicated to different problems, will be formed. (ibid.: 22)*

## 6.8 Creative Dialectical Evolution for Organisational Metaflexibility

Acknowledging ELET as an alternative site of knowledge production enables us to view it as a distributed knowledge system in which all necessary knowledge is not possessed by the single mind of the strategist (Grant, 1996b; Spender, 1996; Tsoukas, 1996 in



Calori, 2002). This view proposes the adoption of a democratic perspective of organisations, affirming and valuing the knowledge held by organisational members (not only senior managers). The essence of organisational capability, according to Calori, is the integration of individuals' specialized knowledge, which can generate new combinations of existing knowledge. Organisational capacity is strengthened by the assimilation of members' lay ontologies and tacit knowledges as well as craft knowledges. These new combinations of knowledge, which comprise 'the continuous experience of the real, in order to inflect the consequences deduced and bend them along the sinuosities of life,' (Bergson, 1907/1983: 213 in Calori, 2002: 137) are the essence of **creative dialectical evolution**. Calori suggests that pure reasoning needs to be supervised by common sense from which intuition emerges. Listening to the common sense expressed by practitioners should stimulate the intuition of researchers when they build theories. Researchers can stimulate them by creating opportunities for practitioners to tell their story. Lived experiences, once elapsed, can be the subject of reflection. Even at a literal level, the work of NGOs epitomizes the features of creative dialectical evolution. Accustomed to working in contexts of minimal resources and adverse conditions, NGOs have become adept at focusing their members' energies on seeking creative contingent solutions to unanticipated challenges, an indication of their metaflexibility. Through a dialectical process involving the coexistence of consensus *and* dissent amongst members and other constituents (Calori, 2002:17), over time, these solutions accumulate to comprise the building blocks of innovative intervention strategies, which if supported by funders, evolve into more formally structured programmes. However, the harried nature of NGO work, especially in developing world contexts, does not allow these programmes to evolve further through active theorising. Collaboration with universities can fill this critical space, allowing knowledge production to differentiate, diversify and develop.

Organisational members who have internalised the principles of creative dialectical evolution can stimulate organisational development through their routine interactions (ibid.). Leaders, for example, enable the process of creative evolution by managing strategy debates in a way that enhances knowledge integration and consequently organisational development. In so doing, they create the conditions of metaflexibility (Volberda, 1996 in Calori). Under the leadership of its founding director, ELET has demonstrated this metaflexibility, which has enabled it to redefine literacy beyond the narrowly conceived definition of literacy as language. His capacity to accumulate the distributed knowledges in the organisation enables him to preserve the energy of an organisation in perpetual motion. His strategic leadership is enhanced by his ability to submerge his own ideological and philosophical orientations in favour of pursuing organisational goals. He is able to dialogue with the different worldviews in the organisation, and by not taking definitive ideological positions, particularly on the issue of language development, about which he feels passionately, he is able to guide ELET through its mutation.

Therefore, by locating literacy within a social emancipatory framework, it has been possible to tap strategically into a development market that no longer values literacy as an instrumental tool. It has been responsive to the opportunities offered by a changing language policy landscape locally and internationally, as well as to funders' changing conceptions of development influenced by broader globalisation discourses. In reconfiguring its identity, it has adopted a pragmatically astute choice to retain its language orientation, because it is this attribute that defines its identity and gives it

legitimacy in the institutional field. Moreover, it is in language development where its intellectual capital is concentrated and its legitimacy enhanced. Any fundamental shift from its language focus has the potential to threaten its legitimacy in the field. However, as seen in chapter 5, despite organisational embeddedness, institutional legitimacy is transient and contingent upon an idiosyncratic education policy process. Organisations such as ELET, which have the capacity to reinvent themselves but are constrained by an unpredictable development arena, need a buffer against their vulnerability. Acquiring this edge necessitates exploiting their skills at employing intuitive problem-solving approaches, graduating to disciplined hermeneutic conversations<sup>72</sup> (Breen, 2002) as a precondition for ongoing rigorous scholarship.

## 6.9 Some Concluding Observations

This chapter has attempted several outcomes with varying degrees of success. I commenced by testing the commonplace assertion that NGOs are instruments of hegemony in sub-Saharan Africa, pandering to the dictates of the neo-liberal agenda. The unfolding arguments explored whether Maclure's, (2000) assertion that this argument is "reductionist", is defensible, first by reviewing the debate concerning the alleged relation between NGOs and the New Policy Agenda of bilateral and multilateral development, and second, by mapping their trajectories onto the specific case of ELET's trajectory. The chapter has argued through a meso-analysis, that ELET, through a triad of isomorphic influences, *has* submitted in a significant degree to the push towards managerialism, and has therefore undermined its capacity as counter hegemonic force against the neo-liberal agenda. In this sense, it is neither hegemonic nor counter-hegemonic, but instead, it is engaged in a process of decentred *anti-hegemony* (Maclure, 2000: 1), that is, its promotion of incremental change in collaboration with the state and business, offers the semblance of change from below, but does not extend to strategies of fundamental political change. By promoting discrete

*...episodic moments... with little programmatic, strategic, or political coherence... (and) if NGO activities remain fragmented and disconnected from equivalent forms of intervention elsewhere, then as the reductionists claim, they are likely to be transitory single-issue sideshows that mainly distract popular attention from the injustices of world capitalism and the systems of governance and policy-making that support global capital (ibid.: 13).*

Preserving the fine line between accounting and accountability is an equally precarious exercise as the prospect of underaccounting and overaccounting renders reflexive accountability a difficult ideal to attain, compounded by inflexible ineffective prescriptions for reporting by funders. We have argued that a possible compromise would be to adopt the most appropriate tool available for the task of achieving accountability. The tool proposed is illuminative evaluation, which reconceptualises development work as research. However, making a convincing case for alternative, ethnographic modes of evaluation is a bit like attempting to fit a roughly defined qualitative peg in the neatly carved empiricist hole, a task easier to pontificate about than to achieve in the development landscape where such approaches are branded as soft and unreliable.

<sup>72</sup> Breen suggests that once teachers are accorded the opportunity to articulate their anecdotal, subjective experiences, it is possible to create a dialogue of resonant and dissonant experiences.

I have argued further that in reconfiguring their identity towards a research organisation, NGOs such as ELET have the potential to address a perennial accusation that educational research is patently irrelevant for those it is intended to serve. It will also help to bridge the specious dichotomy between universities and the 'other' and between practical and theoretical knowledge. It will enable the establishment of a community of reason, which could ensure that teacher education is responsive to pedagogy and context rather than exclusively to policy.

Such a fundamental reconfiguration comes at a price. It means that rather than bemoan instability and insecurity as impediments to organisational productivity, there is a need to value the fluidity and permeability it brings, as fertile ingredients for a organisation in perpetual motion, engaging in a language of creative dialectical evolution.

I have argued as a counterpoint that, despite its inevitable submission to macro economic forces, ELET has nevertheless demonstrated agentic resistance to a myriad of pressures. However, I have also argued that although it has exercised its agency by responding to ecological changes in innovative ways, unless it exploits the potential inherent in its own innovation, it faces obsolescence, as innovation is an insufficient hedge against the impact of globalisation on education and development. I have argued that ELET is eminently placed to make this transition towards a research institute, as it has a management structure that is able to nurture the latent energies of its members, but that certain individuals within the organisation will have to abandon their idealised notions of the organisation's identity, and adopt the enduring principle of metaflexibility. This principle can help it acquire a prized commodity in the postmodern world: rigorous scholarship for social relevance.

During its twenty-year lifehistory, ELET has experienced several reincarnations. From its origins as a one-man road-show with a mission to counter the effects of Bantu education, it grew rapidly in size and influence to become one of the more respected institutes for language development in the country. It has lived through the country's volatile history and contributed marginally to the democratisation of education. While not being overtly political in its stance, it was covertly political in providing alternative opportunities for teacher development, often where none existed. Its ability to survive its various incarnations was aided by the firm foundation in language development which it established over the years, through its intimate involvement with educators in the field. Its tenacious hold on its language mission, coupled with its strategic realignment of its activities, enabled it to reinforce its strengths while pursuing opportunities.

Throughout its chequered history, one of the enduring influences on ELET's identity has been its ability, or inability, to procure funding. In all of its reincarnations, it has not been able to evolve into a form that made it more resilient to the volatile, whimsical world of donors. Hence, the nature and form of ELET's mutation has been shaped largely by funders with dubious agendas, an equally volatile policy environment, and a higher education sector that was itself grappling with its own mutation. In this sense, ELET's mutation was often symbolic rather than substantive. Significantly, the past two decades of ELET's life have coincided with some of the most rapid changes in the world, in all facets of human life. A key engine of change is the globalisation process, led by capital flows of unprecedented magnitude, unevenly spread around the globe, which is increasingly dwarfing the role of ever diminishing concessional aid (Malhotra, 2000:1).

Through this period of transition, ELET was able to mutate from one recognizable form into another without changing its essence because it had access to the cushion that concessionary aid provided. Such cushioning is rapidly eroding in the 'new world order', impelling the organisation towards another creative evolution, only this time, it needs to stand at the top of the Tower of Babel<sup>73</sup> and see how the landscape has changed: the era of corporate philanthropy is but a faint memory in history as it moves into an era of corporate self-preservation. The project of social justice and economic emancipation is diluted as emerging democracies submit to the seductive appeal of the neo-liberal agenda. Education, and higher education in particular, battle to straddle these two worlds, but often fall into the crevice of academic insularity. NGOs for education and development suffer a crisis of credibility as their roles change from that of counter-hegemonic agents, to pseudo-state surrogates for service-delivery. Is there hope in this landscape of apparent despair? There certainly is!

When I started this research project several years ago, I had a faint notion of organisational identity and organisational behaviour. I had a tentative sense that ELET, through its lifetime, had undergone several mutations, but I could not make any definitive claims about this without empirical evidence. Mindful of the danger in imposing my own theoretical assumptions and limited frame of reference on my research participants in order to simply confirm my 'thesis', I designed the study to transfer the responsibility of describing and categorizing their social worlds to my research participants, attempting to triangulate the data, to some extent, through document analysis. I tried not to pre-structure the enquiry with categorizations of my own, or to ask for accounts that I could neatly slot into "pre-fashioned conceptual boxes" (Rustin, 2001:12). Whether or not I have been successful at maintaining 'objective neutrality', will ultimately be judged by the reader. However, as I have said elsewhere<sup>74</sup> the act of simply describing lives with a view to eroticising or vilifying them is an indulgence best left to novelists. While it is important to make visible subjective experiences, it is also important to move beyond the self-understanding of social actors towards more generalised understandings, to situate and make sense of those subjective understandings. This section therefore, attempts to place the ELET narrative and its component fragments on a broader map of organisational theory within a mutating institutional landscape. As lifehistory researchers, we need to move outwards from individual lives, to a model of localised social structure within which the life is situated in the wider social formation.

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<sup>73</sup> Derived from Genesis 11:1-9: "Now the whole earth had one language and few words. And as men migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. And they said to one another, 'Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly.' And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. Then they said, 'Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.' And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the sons of men had built. And the LORD said, 'Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; and nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. Come, let us go down, and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.' So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city.' Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth."

<sup>74</sup> See R. Dhunpath (1998) *A Tapestry of teacher Development Through the Eyes of Cynthia Mpati*. (Unpublished Dissertation), University of Durban Westville, South Africa.



The elucidation of wider social structural understandings from biographical data requires “an interactive conception of the relations between individuals (organisations) and societies” (Rustin, 2001:113). Neither individual, nor organisation, nor society can be considered as if it were a fixed point of reference (ibid.). To suggest therefore that ELET should undergo a fundamental redefinition of its identity, without corresponding reorientations of other components in the institutional field, would be to unwisely ignore the organisation’s situatedness within the institutional field. Situatedness does not annihilate an organisation’s capacity for agency, as was demonstrated using Giddens’s theory of Structuration in chapter 5. We learn from the interrogation of ELET’s lifehistory, through the lenses of structuration, that social structures and cultures are continually reproduced through their social actions and are subject to modification and evolution through the reflexive dimensions of this process (Rustin, 2001). The critical dimension of this production is that it is a dialectical process and, as such, reproducing existing identities does little more than guarantee that hierarchical relations are entrenched without the possibility of creative dialectical evolution; without the possibility of generating a community of reason; without the possibility of reconciling artificially disparate, self preserving entities in society.

### 6.10 Generating a Community of Reason through Creative Dialectical Evolution

One of the more enduring critiques of higher education is the commodification of knowledge, “packaged (for the knowledge economy) and sold in chunks” (Harley and Wedekind, 2002: 3). Similar concerns have been articulated by Moore (2002); Ntshoe, (2002); Waghid, (2002); Dhunpath (2002) Jansen, (2000). In the past five years, no fewer than three journals of education have had special editions on similar themes, as well as the publication of at least ten books on allied themes in South Africa alone. Why has this become such an absorbing concern in the academy? Perhaps one of the more compelling reasons is that behind the alluring appeal of globalised discourse is the stark reality that education in South Africa has failed to honour its emancipatory promise, and the social relevance of its education policies is little more than rhetoric. Jansen, (2000:7) articulates the social cost of a globalised pedagogy:

*...the deterritorialised learner [is] dislocated from familiar cultural or social space, and located within a globalised learning space. At the same time this person is the disembodied learner whose performance across contexts is detached from emotion, experience and content in favour of external demonstrations of behaviour. In the seamless realm of learning, the role of education in transmitting national culture becomes displaced by a focus on education's role in servicing the global economy, wherein each nation is embraced by the logic of competitiveness.*

The seemingly ubiquitous slide towards the corporatisation and marketisation of education is as much a consequence of the centrality of grand narratives of the globalisation discourse, as it is a consequence of the suppression of success narratives of

alternative modes of knowledge-production that accrue from partnership models.<sup>75</sup> These models offer “an inter-disciplinary organisational and cognitive domain for operationalising the frequently cited but not often implemented higher education goal of contributing towards the public good through addressing complex social problems” (Subotsky, 2000:91). While the ELET narrative cannot be unconditionally hailed a raging success story, it certainly provides valuable lessons for how we might re-infuse the emancipatory intent in education policy and pursue the elusive goal of a socially relevant knowledge. Pursuing socially relevant knowledge need not be dismissed as a fashionable buzzword. Therefore, I want to conclude this chapter by offering a glimpse of how the ideal of a socially relevant knowledge may be attained in a tangible way through the adoption of Community Service Learning (CSL), or “service learning” as it is known in the USA.

Service-learning may be described as both a philosophy of education and an instructional method. As a philosophy of education, it gives substance to the principle that education should develop social responsibility and prepare students to be involved citizens in democratic life. As an instructional method, it involves a blending of service activities with the academic curriculum in order to address real community needs while students learn through active engagement (Anderson, J., 1998:2).

Anderson offers the following rationale for Service-Learning in Teacher Education:

- It prepares new teachers to use service-learning as a teaching method with their trainee teachers;
- it helps socialize teachers in the essential moral and civic obligations of teaching, including teaching with “care,” fostering life-long civic engagement, adapting to the needs of learners with diverse and special needs, and having a commitment to advocate for social justice for children and families;
- it enhances pre-service teachers' ability to reflect critically on current educational practices and their own teaching;
- it develops in pre-service teachers the dispositions and abilities needed to easily and fully adopt other educational reforms such as authentic assessment, teaching with integrated thematic units, focusing on higher order thinking skills, and making improvements in school schedules and climate;
- it accelerates the process of learning how to perform a variety of roles needed to meet the needs of students such as counsellor, community liaison, advocate, and moral leader;

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<sup>75</sup> An example of an alternative is the Education Network, or E-Net, formed as an offshoot of the Forum on Education organized by Oxfam in 1999, to take part in the discussion of the Philippine Education for All (EFA), composed of civil society groups concerned with education, including a coalition of children's associations and children's advocates, high school and college student councils, parents' associations in one city district, indigenous peoples associations, public school teachers, community colleges and community learning centres, non-formal education service-providers, and other NGOs that provide technical and advocacy support to the grassroots. A central feature of this coalition is that the different constituencies see each other as partners, not adversaries and believe that, at present, civil society work in education reform comes from two streams: one charitable, philanthropic, and the other political and activist but with a strong history as adversaries of government. But the call of the times is that antagonistic lines are no longer effective and therefore, the rallying point is partnerships. (See Tess Raposas (2000) NGOs network for education reforms, Women's Feature Service, <http://www/NGOs network for education reforms.htm>)

- it develops human service-oriented teachers who can work effectively in schools with integrated services or other social service settings.

The practice of CSL is not new in South Africa. It is an institutionalised feature of some of the professions. Admittedly, the success stories of CSL emanate largely from the USA, where the material contexts are notably different, but it does provide a concrete space to simultaneously reconcile the disparate partners in education towards a common end, making teacher education more accountable to a broader audience than itself. I am therefore advocating a more substantive policy engagement with the concept, so that it brings the different constituencies: the NGO, the state, the corporate sector/funders and the community, into dialogue with each other. There is also evidence that community service learning programmes are gaining momentum internationally (see for example, Amey, Brown, and Sandmann, (2002); Beck, Newton, and Maurana, (2002); Caldwell, Domahidy, and Penick, (2002).

The relevance of CSL for the South African context is articulated by Subotsky, (2000:112): that in fostering community development and social equity, this model constitutes a complimentary alternative to the entrepreneurialisation<sup>76</sup> of higher education; that the model (potentially at least) integrates and mutually enriches experiential learning; the knowledge thus produced in the social and community context of its application closely resembles the socially distributed, applications-driven, Mode 2 knowledge production described by Gibbons (1998) and that, in contrast to growing managerialism, participatory knowledge production in the partnership model involves more collaborative forms of decision-making.

One of the difficulties in implementing the concept, in my experience as an educational manager, is gaining access to sites to enact service learning, and more importantly the absence of capacity to manage and evaluate the process effectively. NGOs, as observed in this study, are suitably capacitated to provide the interface between the teacher education institution and the development site, as well as the capacity to cohere the contributions of other constituencies identified above.

At this time, as I conclude this chapter, ELET has once again been locked in its boardroom, engaging in the language of strategy, making painful decisions about its future identity. It is not difficult to speculate that the ensuing debates will be influenced significantly by the broader debates of globalisation and 'glocalisation'; of shifting government agendas and of changing donor imperatives. It would be a tragic error in judgement if ELET decided to continue being part of the 'global soup kitchen', with itself an 'ordained ladle' (Malhotra, 2000:5). Ironically, an NGO future with vastly decreased aid can herald a healthy transformation in its identity, shifting it from that of surrogate for service delivery to a loftier role of watchdog over the grand promises in government policy. It is imperative that ELET preserves this vital role in the community of reason for creative dialectical evolution. Its intellectual capital, its experience and expertise as innovator, as well as service-deliverer, has equipped it with the skills to make the government more accountable to its very impressive language in education policies. It need not adopt a contestational relationship; neither does it have to surrender its professional autonomy. But it can, through its practical, innovative, community-based

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<sup>76</sup> Subotsky distinguishes between "entrepreneurialisation" and "entrepreneurial" as the former refereeing to function rather than institutional type, and the latter a reference to the "market" university, the current bench of competitive practice.

programmes of action, continue to provide the exemplars and the vision that will enable the state to replicate and scale up these programmes. In this way, both the state and the NGO are able to account 'upwards' to communities rather than 'downwards' to funders. It is crucial that the state recognises the importance of preserving this critical space for the NGO and rather than regard them as either adversaries or allies, to enable and embed a culture of critical collaboration as a hallmark of democracy. However, the reconfiguration of NGO and state relations alone is an insufficient condition for deep change. Higher education institutions need to become less insular and "more porous, more aggressive in seeking partnerships with other knowledge producers" (Subotsky, 2000:90), while the corporate world once again needs to put on its social-conscience hat.

The source of ELET's continued legitimacy in the development field lies in its ability to mutate into an organisation imbued with a strong research ethos. This is easier said than done. NGOs like ELET will have to engage in some soul searching into, among others, the following issues:

- How can it infuse new forms of accountability, more acceptable and appropriate modes of evaluation?
- How do cash strapped NGOs build these modes into their budgets?
- How do NGOs factor-in a mandatory research capacity-building programme into its routine activities?
- How can NGOs make more public their research products; what new ways of representation can make these products more accessible and usable?
- How can this research ethic be institutionalised without compromising service delivery and escalating running costs of NGOs?
- How can NGOs reward research productivity?

While there are no tailor made answers to these and other questions, they are worthy of attention on the agenda of strategic planning meetings as ELET has begun to do. These questions are also worthy of further academic research.



## Chapter 7

### Methodological Reflections

#### SECTION A: A Quest for Heightened Empiricism

During the latter part of the last century, empirical research has been characterised by an expansive proliferation of alternative paradigms, each claiming its space as a legitimate research genre. The quest for legitimacy was often predicated on the assumption that alternative methodologies had to earn their spaces by pandering to the prescriptions of the dominant positivist paradigm. However, the acceptance and popularisation of feminist methods and methodologies have encouraged researchers to resist speculative definitions and binary logic and to privilege narrative theorising. We have moved from post-structuralism's preoccupation with advocacy and defence of alternative approaches, to postmodernism's petition for inclusivity and eclecticism. The consequence is that rather than make spurious claims about reliability and validity, we now acknowledge that, at best, the enterprise of research can bring about a state of heightened empiricism (Gough, 2001). My own quest for space as a life historian has been simultaneously a rewarding and unsettling experience. In this chapter, I reflect on my incursion into the field of narrative research. I have titled the chapter 'methodological reflections' because I regard theory and methodology as intimately discursive components of research in general. I devote the first section of this chapter to a critical reflection of my earlier lifehistory project entitled: "A tapestry of Teacher Development through the Eyes of Cynthia Mpati", which provided the impetus for my doctoral research. In a mode of self-reflexivity, I touch on some of my insights and learnings, while putting up for scrutiny what for me were some of the unresolved theoretical and methodological dilemmas.

I then move on to excerpts and vignettes derived from my work within a doctoral fellowship, which has provided a space from which to disrupt my own essentialist notions of qualitative research. I bring into the spotlight constructs such as validity and reliability, emotionality and neutrality and the influence of competing voices in research production. I also problematise and complicate the assumptions that frame this genre with a view to highlighting the potential hazards of the narrative method becoming a "victory narrative within the redemptive culture of the social sciences" (Cary, 1999: 2). To date, the practice of lifehistory research has largely confined itself to exploring individual identity as window to other epistemological and ontological concerns. While its popularity in ethnographic studies, as a tool for documenting the lives of marginals and subalterns, as well as communities and societies is on the increase, I have not found any significant use of this approach in the study of institutions and organisations. This chapter will critically appraise my use of the genre to excavate institutional identity. I attempt this task with the acute awareness that there is little merit in substituting one brand of methodological triumphalism with another. "Reconstructing academic networks to accumulate narratives (instead of, say, counting the distribution of variables) may merely replace one academic elite with another" (Nespor and Barber, 1995, in Cary, 1999). In exploring the implications of postmodernism for our practices in the world, Lather (1991: 49) cautions us that in "dissembling the master narratives", especially those of Marx and Freud, we do not replace them by Foucault, Derrida, Baudrillard,

Lacan, as new master narratives. She urges a "necessary ambivalence" as "we create a weave of knowing and not knowing which is what knowledge is" (Spivak, 1978 in Lather, 1991). "Additionally, rather than separating the "true" from "false", postmodernism destabilises assumptions of interpretive validity and shifts emphasis to the contexts in which meanings are produced" (Lather, 1991: 44)

## 7.1 Disentangling the Methodological Conundrum

As qualitative researchers grapple with issues of epistemology, the literature is replete with a preoccupation with validity and subjectivity (Barone, 1991; Eisner, 1992; Guba, 1990). Considering these questions of subjectivity, feminist postmodern theorists challenge the humanist assumption of a unitary subjectivity in which people are thought to have "an essence at the heart of the individual which is unique, fixed and coherent and which makes her what she is" (Weedon, 1987:32). Such claims for the existence of a unique, fixed, and coherent self in humanist ideology deny the possibilities of changes in subjectivity over time; mask the critical roles that language, social interactions, and pivotal experiences play in the production and transformation of subjectivity; and ignore gender as a social position that influences the formation of subjectivity. Bloom (1996:176) alludes to how these discussions typically focus on the subjectivity of the researcher in the conduct of research. Despite significant reconceptualisation of the role of subjectivity over the last 30 years, these discussions still assume a subjectivity that is unitary. Because these discussions have influenced my understandings of subjectivity and are the historical and theoretical groundings of my qualitative research practices, I want to borrow Bloom's review of the historical discourses surrounding the use of the term subjectivity in qualitative methodology as a means of signposting the debates. While these categorisations are by no means intended to be comprehensive, definitive or absolute, they provide for me a useful framework for understanding the competing influences on the qualitative movement.

Bloom suggests that in both what is known as the traditional period and modernist phase of qualitative research, there was an attempt to emulate scientific inquiry. "Consequently, subjectivity was relentlessly positioned in opposition to objectivity, was narrowly defined as personal interests and values, and was considered a nemesis of scientific validity"(Bloom, 1996). According to John K. Smith (1993 in Bloom, 1996), under this legacy of empiricism, "to criticize people for being subjective is to criticize them for the failure to maintain a proper detachment from their own particular emotions, values, and/or personal preferences" (p. 30, *ibid.*). Thus, the regulative ideal of good qualitative research behaviour was the repression, or the appearance of repression, of subjectivity.

Bloom characterises the period from about 1970 to 1986, as a period in which qualitative researchers attempted to distance themselves from these scientific norms and to connect more with the humanities and humanistic conceptions of subjectivity (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Geertz, 1983,*ibid.*). Subjectivity then attained a more nuanced definition as "the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to the world" (Weedon, 1987, p. 32,*ibid.*). Therefore, rather than trying to "exorcise subjectivity from their hearts, minds, and texts, qualitative researchers instead attempted to analyse their subjectivities as interesting, inescapable components of an inquiry process" (Bloom, 1996: 176).

However, empiricism's grip being what it is, we also find in this genre attempts to systematically account for, manage, and even tame subjectivity (Peshkin, 1988, *ibid.*).

The fourth moment of qualitative research, as characterised by Denzin (1995) and Lincoln, (1985) which is generally regarded as the crisis of representation, subjectivity is associated with self-reflexivity and positionality. Self-reflexivity requires frank self-declaration as a researcher about how race, class, gender, religion, and personal/social values influence the researcher's understanding of the power dynamics of the research setting, the phenomena under study, and researcher-respondent relationship. Although self-reflexivity may transcend the taming of subjectivity, as Marcus (1994, in Bloom 1996) observes, "this kind of reflexive location of oneself, while potentially a practice of key importance, all too often becomes a gesture that is enforced by politically correct convention" (p. 572).

In exploring issues of subjectivity and validity, Lather (1991:66) asks: "what does empirical rigour mean in a post-positivist context... if validity criteria are the products of the paradigms which spawn them, what validity criteria best serve praxis-oriented research programs?" Lather contends that if illuminating theory grounded in reliable data is desired, we must formulate self-corrective techniques that test the credibility of data and minimise the distorting effect of personal bias upon the logic of evidence. In response to the demand by "qualitative criteriologists" (Seale, 1999), a variety of new concepts were spawned. For example, Altheide and Johnson's (1994 in Seale, 1999:2) review of interpretivist positions on validity identifies "successor validity, catalytic validity, interrogated validity, transgressive validity, imperial validity, simulacra/ironic validity, situated validity and voluptuous validity". This proliferation of concepts reflects the desire for qualitative methodologists to create some legitimate overarching specification for quality. The difficulty of course, with criteriology, is that it is difficult in constraining and regulating an "endeavour whose guiding philosophy often stresses creativity, exploration, conceptual flexibility and freedom of spirit" (Seale, 1999:3). However, it is apparent that this conceptual proliferation is also an indicator of what Lather (2001) calls "paradigm proliferation". Implicit is a conscious attempt to extend the limiting prescriptions of the modernists with their demand for truth-value, applicability, consistency and neutrality, which are seen to be based on naïve realist assumptions and linear causality. I am therefore inclined towards Lincoln and Guba's (1985) propositions for naturalistic enquiry.

Lincoln and Guba propose a four-point criterion, in which they suggest that credibility should replace truth and the technique for establishing this should be "member checks"<sup>77</sup>. Transferability should replace applicability; dependability should replace consistency and auditing, a means of methodological reflexivity, should replace neutrality. However, as Seale observes, this criteria depends on a contradictory philosophical position: that the belief in multiple constructed realities, rather than a single tangible reality, is not consistent with the idea that criteria for judging the trustworthiness of an account are possible. Acknowledging that research accounts "do no more than represent a sophisticated but temporary consensus of views about what is to be considered true"

<sup>77</sup> Lincoln and Guba (1985:236) suggest the use of member checks to obtain "information that the report has constructed by the informants, or to correct and extend it". However, Seale (1993:274) argues that this description of member checking reflects the realist notion that there is some true interpretation the researcher is obliged to ferret out and which the participants are able to certify as correct. He believes that member checking is more about collecting additional data than about verifying the truth.



(Seale, 1999:3), Guba and Lincoln offer a fifth criterion: "authenticity", demonstrated by the ability of researchers to show that they have represented a range of different realities. They propose a more sophisticated understanding of the phenomenon being studied (ontological authenticity); evidence of admitting multiple perspectives (educative authenticity); demonstration of some form of resultant action (catalytic authenticity) and some evidence of empowerment of participants (tactical authenticity). Lather (1991) endorses the notion of catalytic validity, which represents the degree to which the research process re-orient, focuses and energises participants towards knowing reality in order to transform it. This for me is the essence of emancipatory evaluation research: the desire to consciously channel respondents towards gaining self-understanding and, ultimately, self-determination through research participation. However, "An emancipatory intent is no guarantee of an emancipatory outcome" (Acker, et al., 1983: 431, in Lather, 1991). Lather argues that too often, researchers who conduct empirical research in the name of emancipatory politics fail to connect their doing of research with their political commitments. If the underlying outcome of evaluation research is to encourage self and social understandings and to promote change enhancing action, then our research designs need to resonate with our espoused missions.

## 7.2 Objective Neutrality and Emotional Exhibitionism

In grappling with issues of integrity, validity, and emancipatory politics, I am reminded of my previous biographical research entitled "*A Tapestry of teacher development through the eyes of Cynthia Mpati*"<sup>78</sup>. This study provides an intimate view into the precipitous personal circumstances of a leading teacher educator in South Africa, uncovering the multiple layers of institutional and structural constraint she had to endure as she railed against a reticent androcentric bureaucracy to institute Vulani - an alternate teacher development programme for uncertified teachers who, at the time, were condemned to perpetual disadvantage by Bantu Education. The study alerted me to a myriad of potential methodological hazards facing a novice life historian. First was the danger of misinterpreting data, making too much of ambiguous data, and often concluding with inaccurate, unreliable or biased interpretations (Huberman and Miles, 1994). I rationalised this "blank spot" (Gough, 2001) by suggesting that it is impossible, in the absolute sense, to create an objective biography, since the biographer brings some of his/her own experiences and perspectives into the co-constructed lives. These human fallibilities are crucial for us as qualitative researchers, as we negotiate meanings, as well as actions (ibid.). We rely in part on the explanations and perspectives we are given and we must live with the knowledge that because we too are human, our own experiences are equally vulnerable. Indeed, as Baronne (2001:3) asks: "are the informants whose 'selves' are presented and examined in a narrative work any more or less truthful (and

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<sup>78</sup> See Dhunpath, R (1999) "A Tapestry of teacher development in KZN through the eyes of Cynthia Mpati", Using Anthony Giddens' Structuration Theory as a conceptual framework, the study explores the potential of individual agency, examining whether its scope at transforming institutional structures has been romanticised. Framed in a discourse that foregrounds the role of gender dynamics as a mediating influence on agency, the study surveys the process of Teacher Education policy formulation and implementation in the apartheid and post apartheid era. In examining the experience of individual and institutional change in relation to policy, the study proposes an eclectic approach, which embraces the stage development model, to explain the complex intersection of the socio-political-and economic dimensions in Teacher Education.



therefore 'factual') than the researcher/biographer?" I think not. Grumet (1988, in Baronne, 2001:3) accurately describes stories as "masks through which we can be seen," with every telling of a story a "potential prevarication". In the telling, personal interests are omnipresent. Moreover, human beings are only able to "construe their lives within the confines of linguistic and social conventions", conventions that are designed to evoke particular responses in an audience. (Gergen, 1988:102, in Baronne, 2001). It is impossible, in the figurative sense at least, to strip off the masks of individuals, or prevent the (re)crafting and (re)shaping of their identities. The resulting rhetorical figures would still vary in accordance with those "specific situations within fields of power, history, and culture" (Kondo, 1990, in Baronne, 2001). Moreover, in autobiography, multiple versions of the "self" are simultaneously in play. There is, for example,

*the self then, the self now recalling then, the self now interpreting the self then from the present self's perspective, the self now thinking of possible future selves, a possible future self looking back to now to the present self seeing it as in the past.*  
(Cortazzi, 1993, p. 13, in Baronne, 2001)

### 7.3 The Fragility of Autobiographical Memory

The next hazard I had to confront was the issue of voice. How do persons voice their narratives or narrate their voices? (Antoinette, 2000). One of the claims made by some vainglorious narrative researchers is the notion that they allow respondents/participants "to speak for themselves". This, I learnt, is a methodological illusion since several dynamics, conscious or unconscious; overt and covert, impinge on the interview process and product, reinforcing Noel Gough's (2001) proposition that data is never gathered, but produced. The notion of researcher as "producer", (in the sense of a film producer) is for me a more plausible and appropriate description of researcher agency than idealised versions of researcher-as-emancipator, which is often found in qualitative literature. In essence, therefore, my voice as researcher (despite my best efforts to mute or artificially silence it) plays as influential a role in the data, as the research participant's voice projects a particular intonation of his/her identity. Pamphilon (1999: 2) illustrates this point in her use of the "zoom model" in film making. The photographer selects the subject taken, chooses the type of shot (e.g. angle and light) and constructs the image for a particular purpose. The researcher as producer is thus actively playing an interpretative role, while in generating and selecting data. She chooses what to elicit, highlight, and make visible. Richardson (1992:131 in Rhodes: 2000) extends the metaphor by suggesting that, "no matter how we stage the text, we - the authors - are doing the staging. As we speak *about* the people we study, we also speak *for* them. As we inscribe their lives, we bestow meaning and promulgate values". As Portelli (1991, in Pamphilon, 1999: 3) concludes: "the narrator does not speak in the abstract, but speaks to the historian, with the historian and in through the historian". Pamphilon's visual metaphor reminds us of "the difference between looking and seeing, and that looking preserves the ontological separation of beings into viewer and viewed whilst seeing on the other hand begins the project of traversing the gap... preparing for the possibility that the subject's action arises out of the ground of meaning" (Deveraux, 1995: 70-71 in *ibid.*).

What happens when we add to this postmodern cauldron, issues of memory? I did not fully appreciate the methodological and epistemological implications of this blindspot when I began constructing Cynthia's educational lifehistory. I believed at the time that if

I dug hard and long enough, I could eventually excavate any memory and unleash any voice (Antoinette, 2000). I have since acknowledged that there are memories I *should not* unearth and voices I *cannot* collect. Instead, I am now more inclined to ask: How do people select their memories? What cultural processes do they follow? What happens to experience on the way to becoming memory? I am now cognisant of different kinds of memory, such as Teski and Climo's (1995, in Antoinette, 2000) categorisation of remembering, forgetting, reconstructing memory, metamorphosis of memory and vicarious memory. Questions such as these have prompted cognitive scientists to investigate the fragility of autobiographical memory (see Baronne, 2001:4). We are now beginning to appraise the impact of how particular ways of asking questions generate particular ways of telling, and that in some instances unintended watershed questions unlock a stream of memory that may seem extraneous to the researchers' immediate objectives, but are deeply illuminating of unanticipated data. We are beginning to see that unlocking the watershed of memory requires that we first construct a solid interpersonal bridge based on trust, respect and integrity; that sometimes it is necessary to stop listening for what we could extract from the narrative and to listen to stories that do not fit neatly into our frame of reference. We know now that the narratives of our participants run alongside our own narratives, and that their memories vicariously become our own memories. We suspect that some memories are more meaningful when they are shared with some audiences and not others, or best narrated in the absence of an interviewer

In dealing with these many dilemmas at that stage, I found it possible, to some extent, to limit the degree of intrusion of the biographer's vulnerability by maintaining a conscious effort to minimise biographer interpretation and misinterpretation. Smith (1994: 292) calls it the "scholarly historical" form, which retains a heavy factual emphasis and a strong chronological organisation. As a scholarly compromise, therefore, I had chosen to present the biography in the first person narrative (with Cynthia Mpati the researched as narrator) in a continuous uninterrupted life story, using teacher development in Kwa-Zulu Natal as the thematic axis. However, my literary background alerted me to further complexities in the representational process. I was aware that my own narrative persuasion was largely a Eurocentric one, privileging the epic, the romanesque and the picaresque canons<sup>79</sup> of narrative. There was in my narrative positioning, an almost imperceptible slide towards the monomyth, a narrative that places the character as central to a heroic trajectory. Pamphilon (1999:5) suggests that this archetype of narrative form rarely accords with female experience that, "rather than being unidirectional, exhibits story lines that are multiple, recursive and intermingled with self and other". As a woman positions herself (often in binaries) as a particular form of wife, mother or woman, she also chooses what not to be. In what she regards as our textual representation of other people's lives, Lather (1991:25) alerts her readers to what she refers to as "post representational theory", where language does not transparently reflect reality, but rather is productive and constitutive of reality (Rhodes: 2000). Hammersely (1992), referring to this as "subtle realism", suggests that language constructs new worlds and is referential to a reality outside the text, a means of communicating past experiences as well as imagining new experiences. This position contradicts the constructivists' position that there is no way of knowing the real world that exists separately from language. Hammersely proposes a 'fallibilistic' approach, regarding

<sup>79</sup> The epic model is one of conformity that identifies with the core values of the culture, the Romanesque constructs a life where change has been possible through notions of individual challenge, and the picaresque model challenges the hegemonic values of that culture. (see Pamphilon, 1999)



truths as provisional until there is good reason for contradictory versions to gain support (Seale, 1999). Thus, my decision to present a unified seamless narrative was a stylistic one and did not imply that the story captured a rational and coherent truth. It responded, in part, out of my obligation to honour the participant's apparent desire to create and maintain a positive self-image. This was in a sense, a technical decision of representational choice; there are other dilemmas that are more difficult to resolve:

#### 7.4 The Politics of Emotional Exhibitionism

As a counterpoint, we might ask: what of the silences? Can we know with any degree of certainty whether silencing is a conscious or an unconscious act, an act of self-censorship or a strategic selection of what may be shared and made public? Why, for example, did Cynthia not disclose (what I considered) crucial information about her relationship with her husband? I have contemplated the question, but have not attempted to probe it, and perhaps this reflects the kind of morbid emotional curiosity that separates the researcher from the soap opera writer. Emotional responses and "emotional data" (Lather, 1997), are regarded as a legitimate means of social enquiry. We are warned that in handling emotional data, we must resist becoming "emotional exhibitionists" (Ellis & Flaherty, 1992:3, in Pamphilon, 1999). In constructing the narrative, I reluctantly edited out large sections of Cynthia's heart-wrenching experiences precisely because they smacked of exhibitionism, and threatened to degenerate into a soap opera, rather than illuminate the life of an educator in any significant degree. However, I pause here to acknowledge that my decision to avoid emotional exhibitionism was essentially a political act. It was borne out of the desire to preserve objective neutrality as though there was something profoundly sacred in either objectivity or neutrality. Perhaps I was trying to induce these illusory vestiges of positivism to compensate for my own sense of insecurity with the methodology. The value of self-reflexivity is that it allows for self-censure without the obligation for reparations. I therefore confess, now, that my decision to declare sections of the data inadmissible, because they destabilised my fragile positionality as researcher, was indeed an act of arrogance. However, problematising one's blind spots does not absolve the researcher from culpability, neither does it mean that we reject the approach because we cannot de-problematise, normalise and neutralise it. These "joys and perils of narrative research" (Dhunpath, 1998), do not detract from the importance of stories whether or not they live up to the arbitrary coveted narrative standards of the West. It inspires me to work within and against the limits and possibilities of the approach, with an obligation to recognise these limits and expand their boundaries. With the wisdom of hindsight, and an evolving antiessentialist approach to lifehistory research, I began a new troubling journey, with the hope of clearing up more of my blind spots.

I am also inspired by temerity of Le Guin, (1985, p. 317, in Bloom, 1996) who declares:

*The story is not all mine nor told by me alone. Indeed, I am not sure whose story it is; you can judge better. But it is all one, and if at moments the facts seem to alter with an altered voice, why then you can choose the fact you like best; yet none of them is false, and it is all one story.*

## Section B:

### Methodological Vigilance:

#### 7.5 From Data to Text - Crafting the Narrative

I have often claimed that my Master's in Education research was one of the more rewarding pursuits in my academic life. The decision to embark on an institutional biography for my doctoral research was therefore a logical one as it allowed me the space to expand the methodology to excavate a broader, potentially richer collective life. The euphoria of an innovative idea is soon replaced by the cold reality of the doing. I soon realised that one of the more challenging occupational hazards facing the lifeist story researcher is the agony of transcribing enormous amounts of anecdotal information, which the researcher is forced to admit as data, in order to capture the participant's voice authentically. This I found frequently to be the case as most of the interviews in this study were semistructured- or unstructured, allowing participants the opportunity to probe the recesses of folded memories, while revelling nostalgically in stories hitherto untold. All of this makes for compelling listening and absorbing reading, but it only dimly illuminates substantive issues. The sheer enormity of the data set: more than one-hundred hours of recorded interviews over a period of two years, with no fewer than ten participants from different parts of the country, is a daunting prospect, prompting any researcher to employ what hard-nosed positivists would regard as 'strategic manipulation' to make the data set manageable.

Having waded vigilantly through several hours of transcription, the next challenge was to transmute these into a coherent narrative with the ingredients of a bestseller, while simultaneously capturing nuanced meanings that allow for substantive conceptual analysis and theorising. To achieve this result, I found myself editing out a significant volume of the "less relevant" data, admitting only that which heralded some promise for narrative theorising. In this way, selected empirical elements that are combined within the text serve an important literary purpose. For the reader to be lured into a mental reconstruction of the text, the apparition to be reconstructed must be plausible, credible, believable, possess a sense of fidelity - qualities often associated with good narrative and qualitative research (Bruner, 1986; Lincoln and Guba, 1986; Grumet 1988 in Baronne, 1999). "A text that conveys a sense of closely observed realities - psychological, sociological, and/or physical - is more likely to succeed in seducing the reader into an engagement with the text (Baronne, 1999). However, seduction often compromises objectivity and this once again raised the perennial concern of "validity".

Lindsay (1999:2) summarises the typical transcription exercise (involving language as data) as audio or videotaping communicative interaction followed by verbatim transcription and analysis using a form of coding to make sense of the data. However, in some disciplines, where language data is used in clinical or instructional practice, there is debate about whether omitting the transcription component and coding onsite in real time or coding directly from the audio/video record, can be substituted for the full process with satisfactory results. This prompted the question of whether I should follow the tedious route of transcription, selection and then constructing the narrative if I had already instituted mechanisms that monitored elements of reliability, such as member



checks and triangulation through document analysis. The obvious answer was that the longer route was the proper route to take, to preserve the integrity of the process, and the fidelity of the meanings generated. However, I was not quite impressed with this less than convincing rationalisation, since all life stories are necessarily partial and incomplete. I reflected on my unease and resolved I was the architect of the research design, and surely, I had some degree of authority over what data I chose to represent as appropriate. I resolved that I was going to attempt selective transcription, of what in my view was pertinent data.

I listened to the recording, jotting some notes in the form of generic themes and conceptual categories, and then began the actual transcription, fast-forwarding and editing out less useful data. This was gratifying. Without engaging in the drudgery of verbatim transcription, I had a leaner, cleaner data set that captured the essence of the interview without discernible loss of meaning or form. As I reconstructed the story (from the truncated transcripts), of Mervyn's awe-inspiring youth as teacher educator, exiled somewhere in Africa, I wondered what it would be like to circumvent the intermediate process of transcription and proceed with constructing the narrative directly from the recordings through a process of strategic selective transcription. This of course raised the challenge of interpretative authority, as any form of selection constitutes interpretation and introduces a minefield of methodological challenges.

Typically, dissertations and theses refer routinely to transcription in the methodology chapter. In my observation, reports and academic papers seldom articulate the politics of transcription. Hence, these reports seldom go beyond a simple statement that "audio-or videotaped data were transcribed". There appears to be an assumption that transcription practices are unproblematic and that the transcript is a technical, transparent exercise, reflecting the hard reality of the interaction as captured electronically (see Landsay, 1999). The absence of established conventions in transcription practice means that there is also a relative absence of theoretical and methodological debate on these issues. This is particularly surprising since at the heart of the problem is that language is the unit of analysis, and is widely acknowledged that language is not transparent or fully replicable. Communicative interaction prefigures a range of indicators about the speaker's interests, knowledge, thoughts and feelings all of which are being created and recreated in the discourse (Denzin, 1995). There are crucial questions that need to be foregrounded when making choices about transcription modes, such as:

- Is it possible to achieve one-to-one matches between the components of discourse events and the symbols for representing these events?
- How could transcript preparation procedures be designed to balance between competing demands of efficiency and accuracy?
- What paralinguistic and nonverbal information should be included, and what conventions should be used to symbolise or present it?

Researchers make choices about whether to transcribe, what to transcribe and how to represent the transcription. Implicit in these choices is a suggestion that researchers enact their particular theoretical positions they hold. Different transcriptions are constructs of different worlds; each designed to fit our particular theoretical assumptions. Bloom (1993, in Lindsay, 1999:5) argues that the researcher is already making coding decisions through the transcription focus and choice of convention, and that secondary coding both is constrained by, and further elaborates these initial choices. The challenge, for

researchers is not how to represent the communicative interaction exhaustively, but how to efficiently reduce the data to allow for rich interpretations. Lindsay argues that the usual practice of painstakingly, through repetitive review, replicating the communicative interaction, simply delays the actual analysis until after the transcription is complete. He argues that this delay constrains the researcher's analysis and theorising, limiting it to hearing what is being said and noting how it has been said, as there can never be a linear relationship between conversational events and its representation. Rather, the process of transcription is both interpretative and constructive.

Another compelling question facing the researcher in the transcription process is the role of contextual and environmental information and whether this influences the quality of data. Since context is by nature "infinitely delicate" and "infinitely expandable" (Cook, 1990 in Lindsay, 1999:7), transcription can never be complete or objective. Lindsay cites Poland (1995), who underscores the danger in reifying the transcript. He suggests that any text is socially, culturally, historically, racially, and sexually located, and can therefore "never represent any truth except those truths that exhibit the same characteristics" (p.280). This points to the fundamentally "unscientific" nature of transcription and by implication, analysis, a reality that needs to be acknowledged rather than disguised. In this sense therefore, a disciplined approach to selective transcription may be justifiable. However, this should not legitimate the "slippery slope towards unprincipled inclusiveness" (ibid.: 7). Simply ignoring contextual data arising from cultural and gendered practices is indefensible. Kvale (1996 in Lindsay, 1999:8) characterises qualitative interviewing as interpretative constructions arrived at through strategic choices of transcription conventions. Rather than aiming for completeness, researchers should ask instead: what is a useful transcription for my research purposes? He regards interview transcripts as "an impoverished basis for interpretation" and suggests that "attempts at verbatim transcriptions produce hybrids, artificial constructs that are neither the lived oral conversation nor the formal style of written texts" (p9).

What then are the implications of the above critique of transcription practices for the lifehistory researcher whose primary tools of the trade are interview data? Betrand et al., 1992; Gravois et al., 1992; Kieren and Munro, 1985 in Lindsay, 1999) have suggested various shortcuts to interpretation, ranging from direct coding of recordings to on site real time coding. However, all of these approaches result in varying degrees of loss of data or inaccurate capturing of data. In an attempt to evaluate the merits of transgressing the dominant TICI convention (Tape, Transcribe, Code, Interpret), I needed to validate and authorise this transgression to rationalise its use and ease my discomfort with it. I decided to use my discursive space in a doctoral fellowship to do this. I crafted Tracy's story directly from the recording, capturing the essence of what I considered to be of critical importance in answering the critical question, i.e.: *How does Tracy's work with the PHASE project represent an attempt by ELET to strategically reinvent itself to respond to changing development realities.* I presented an edited version of the narrative to a group of doctoral fellows and their supervisors, and asked them to reflect critically on the narrative after listening to the original recording: I posed the following questions to help frame their critique:

1. In the process of representing lifehistory data, the researcher has several options, among others in the continuum are :
  - Assume the position as FIRST PERSON narrator (Worm's eye view)

- Assume the position of OMNISCIENT narrator (Bird's eye/God's eye view)

2. In the tradition of "reliable" data capturing, both of the above approaches require the verbatim transcription of interview data before "conversion" to narrative. In adopting the First Person narrative:

- What are the merits/demerits of "skipping" the intermediate step of "conversion"?
- What are the ethical implications of the researcher "appropriating" the voice of the research subject?
- Is the resultant "data record" an authentic representation?
- What degree of "licence" does the researcher have over the representation and manipulation of data?
- How does the researcher "dissolve" the voice of the researcher into the text without fracturing the narrative?
- How do you harmonise the "blank spots", "blind spots" and "benign spots" when dissolving the narrator's voice into the narrative?

3. Consider elements of interview style and technique:

- To what extent does the researcher's style of questioning predispose the respondent to particular kinds of responses? (consider use of tone, register, language, relationship with respondent etc.)
- To what extent does the selection of questions pre-empt particular kinds of responses?

The responses were diverse and disparate but interesting. One of the supervisors, Dr. R. dismissed the transcript as fraudulent in that it failed to capture certain essences in the participant's argument. Other students suggested that I was manipulating the interview process by imposing a particular understanding of literacy on Tracy, based on the Freirean model of Local literacies, pioneered in rural communities in Brazil. They suggested that the consequence of this kind of imposition was that I was attempting to elevate Tracy's work by ascribing some sort of theoretical rationale to it. The consequence, they added, was that rather than articulate her own conception of literacy, Tracy was attempting to "upstage" the project to resonate with my theoretical assumptions. What, in reality, was my agenda?

It turned out that they were all correct. Dr R. in particular was accurate in her accusation. I had in fact "doctored" the transcript to demonstrate the potential dangers of selective transcription, that shortcutting had distinct advantages; but it posed real dangers, particularly when "essences" were distorted or excluded. But what are "essences"? Is the quest for essences not determined by the critical question? Do essences have a unitary existence in the minds of different researchers?

The doctoral fellows were correct too: I was deliberately trying to challenge Tracy to extend and expand her conception of what she regarded as 'ordinary' work. In my mind, the PHASE programme was based on a highly sophisticated conception of literacy,

which was a challenge to the purists' notion of linguistic literacy, a model of literacy that acknowledges a variety of psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic contextual realities that mediate language acquisition and cognitive development. As long as Tracy conceived of her work as ordinary, relegating it to perpetual marginality in relation to the mainstream projects of ELET, Tracy would be perpetually "otherised" in relation to mainstream project staff. Here I was using my considerable power as researcher to elevate the research to an act of illumination as a prelude to empowerment.

## 7.6 The Politics and Ethics of Evaluations

Should practitioners have control over a researcher's access to information about their practices, and the conditions governing the release of this information for public consumption? Do practitioners and administrators with a public profile have an inalienable right to ownership of 'facts' about their lives? Do researchers, by virtue of the intrinsic value of what they do, have a right to know, and do practitioners, by virtue of this intrinsic value of the research act, have an obligation to disclosure? I had to confront these and other extremely contentious questions as I experienced my different research participants, and I am no nearer now to answering these questions than I was before I started this research project. The dilemma arose when I asked one of the research participants, *Rene* (pseudonym) to peruse a paper I had written, and which was accepted for publication by an accredited journal of education. The paper explored the relationship between the NGO sector, the corporate sector and the state. The paper, based on selected vignettes from interviews, proposed a theory of isomorphism to exemplify the relationship between NGO, the corporate funder and the state (this discussion appears in chapter 6 of this thesis). I had already shared the paper with a critical friend a colleague, and presented it at a symposium, to test the veracity of the claims. I requested Rene's blessing in publishing the paper and advised him that in order to protect his professional interests, I had edited out all references to his identity and that of the organisation he represented. Further, I indicated that I would be happy to edit any part of the paper he found problematic. I did this out of the sincere conviction that the integrity of the research process should take precedence over my academic interests, and also because of my commitment to representing my research subjects as authentically and accurately as possible. However, I had not bargained for the response, which suggested that my analysis was inaccurate and flawed, primarily because Rene was cited as the source of isomorphic pressures that shaped the identity of ELET. In response to his protests, I edited the paper further, and in the process, eliminated crucial analytical insights, which in my view diluted the theoretical strength of the paper.

I am fully cognisant of the position that, on one hand, the right to know the "truth" and to proclaim it in the public domain seems quite defensible if there is a clear association between the right and the pursuit of disinterested enquiry (Pring, 1984). I am also cognisant that, on the other hand, such a connection cannot always be assumed to exist independently of the agendas, interests, prejudices and even political ends that researchers might possess. For this reason, a framework of broad principles, that balances rights and obligations, needs to be negotiated. This is particularly important in developing world contexts where ethics is an integral component in consolidating democracies, defining national identities and reclaiming lost cultures. As a researcher, I subscribe to the ethical principles advocated by the biomedical field, namely:



1. Autonomy (respect for the person-reverence for human dignity);
2. Beneficence (benefit to the research participant) ;
3. Non-Maleficence (absence of harm to the research participant) ;
4. Justice (notably distributive justice-equal distribution of risks and benefits between communities) (see Helden and Bohm, 2002).

While the above ethical principles are not ranked in any order, it would be reasonable to expect a balanced adherence to the four principles. The ethical framework would also need to clarify the kinds of knowledge the researcher seeks and to make available the data and research papers to the research participant. Should there be any dissonance between the researcher and researched, the researched should enjoy a right to a published rejoinder. In addition, issues of trust and confidentiality should take precedence over all other concerns. In some senses, the rights of research participants are already guaranteed under the principles of "informed consent" and further enshrined in the constitution and common law, which in the South African context is considered to be among the most sophisticated statutes in the world.

But what of the rights of the researcher? Are the rights accorded to research subjects disproportionate to those of the researcher, constraining her analytical voice at the risk of diluting it, muting it, or at worst, repressing it? Contemporary literature on the power relations between the researcher and research subjects/participants seems to be premised on a notion that researchers are intrinsically dishonest and unscrupulous, and that research subjects are helpless, vulnerable victims to predatory researchers. That these are indeed the tendencies of some researchers is undeniable, but what are the implications for academic freedom for researchers who do subscribe to ethical practices? Hollis, (1984 in Elliot, 1984:20) contrasts a social science operating with a model of man as *Plastic Man* with one that views him as *Autonomous Man*. In this dichotomy, Plastic Man is passive; "a programmed feedback system, whose inputs, outputs and inner workings can be given many interpretations" (p20), while Autonomous Man is active, having "some species of substantial self within" (p20). Elliot suggests that when the social researcher views social action as the product of that substantial self, then the practitioner becomes an object of ethical concern, and methodology becomes inseparable from ethics. In this conception, Autonomous Man creates his own acts out of his own constructions of social reality; an interpretative framework of values and beliefs, which define his obligations to others, and theirs to him. The way he describes these acts is conditioned by his interpretation of the social context in which they occur. It is only from the perspective of Autonomous Man that "a knowledge of social action becomes viewed as the private property of practitioners. In this view, interpretations of social reality (based on different interpretative frameworks researchers use to guide their conduct) are a matter of private rather than public knowledge.

Such a view of truth is grounded in a researcher's experience of what Cupitt, (1976, in Elliot, 1984: 20) calls "the interpretative plasticity of the world... the world of our experience is seemingly willing to lend itself to interpretation in terms of a great variety of different frameworks". It is an experience that presupposes the existence of a "pluralistic democracy" (ibid.) in which people not only differ in the ways they interpret the social world but are accorded the freedom to enact these interpretations without interference or fear of censure and censorship. Denying researchers this ethical right erodes the sphere of the "private" while the virtues of "interpretative plasticity" vanish behind a screen of pseudo-democracy where an inordinate proportion of rights are

guaranteed for research subjects, and too few are allowed for researchers. I concur with Elliot's assertion that such ethical concerns are quite independent from methodological ones, and must not be confused with considerations in which ethics are inextricably bound up with methodology: "It is one thing to negotiate what the publicly accessible facts of a social situation are, and quite another to negotiate whether or not they ought to remain hidden" (p24). The confusion between these things in the minds of many researchers, including myself, has resulted in the sacrifice of the ethics of truth for the ethics of release. Clearly, therefore, the potentiality of this study has been constrained by these delicate considerations and, therefore, this study has limitations, which I will reflect on briefly.

Because the research is limited to a longitudinal analysis of the trajectory of a single NGO, and hence loses the variance which longitudinal cross societal-sectoral study may offer, its theoretical contribution and substantive policy implications are limited. On one hand, the advantage of a substantive and detailed study of a single NGO is that one is able to excavate the contours of institutional life that survey methods alone can never hope to uncover. On the other hand, the deeply contextualized nature of the study has implications for the generalisability of the 'findings'.

I have attempted in this study, to address both micro and macro levels of discourse, in the sense of spoken or written language use at the level of discursive practice, as well as "the totality of discursive practice of an institution, and relationships between them" (Alvesson and Larreman, 2000). Alvesson and Larreman suggest that there is a tension between these two levels because it is difficult to accurately account for both in the same study. They add, however, that this should not discourage such efforts. Rigour should sometimes be downplayed for the benefit of social relevance.

As argued above in this chapter, a potential limitation of discourse as an analytical tool is the way in which different individuals use discourses to construct themselves in relation to others. This is especially true of the way in which research participants construct themselves in relation to the researcher. The archetypical image of individuals is that of the 'discourse-driven subject'<sup>80</sup>. Contrary to this image, the subject may be a politically conscious language user, "telling the right kind of stories to the right audiences at the right moment" (Alvesson and Larreman, 2000:8). The world of corporate management calls for sophisticated, politically conscious language use, in which the language user separates or loosely couples discourse and meaning. Alvesson and Larreman suggest that the higher one goes in the corporate world, the more essential is the mastery of provisional language. Some argue that advancement beyond the upper levels of corporate structures depends greatly on one's ability to manipulate a large variety of symbols without becoming tied to or identified with any of them. However, this is an extreme position, which is perhaps relevant when a single subject comprises the data set. Multiple subjects provide an element of triangulation.

It is also important not to forget that implicated in this discussion are a host of people who agreed graciously to share a part of their lives with us. Some of them have done this despite the attendant risk in narrative research, particularly since researchers are

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<sup>80</sup> Subjects are usually regarded as fragile, constituted by and/or within discourses. There is a tendency to ascribe inordinate power to the latter, rather than acknowledge the agency of the subject.

notorious for unscrupulously exploiting research participants (as discussed earlier). I cannot claim to have achieved the impossible feat of stuffing 'a real life person between the pages of a text' (Denzin, 1989: 82 in Rhodes, 2000) nor of uncovering the deep recesses in my participants lives. All I can claim to have done is present an image of their lives and to have dialogued with it. Their experiences have not been "reduced to any essential foundations through which we can know something about organisational life, but has rather been expanded and made more problematic by an act which I have chosen to call research" (Rhodes, 2000), an act which serves merely to produce more text, and more rather than less problematic meanings, and more questions than answers.

Because of this, as a research fellow in a doctoral consortium, I often felt that my approach to research was that of a maverick. This feeling was reinforced when I attended a doctoral seminar at a South African university on education policy research. An invited scholar of international repute, critiquing the role of qualitative research in policy studies, remarked that South Africa did not have the luxury of dabbling in soft research methodologies and that there was a need to return to large scale (hard) empiricist models if such research is to be legitimate and valid. He added that, since the USA funded the research, the country owed it to the funder to engage in research that had global relevance. I wish to indulge the reader in this somewhat divergent 'whinge', related to the ethics and politics of research. In particular, I wish to focus on the subtle coercion that international funders of research employ to promote particular research agendas. At that stage, I was quite irritated by this display of condescension and I wrote this to my research supervisor:

*...through my experiences as a transdisciplinary researcher, I have put to rest many sterile debates about the relative superiority of one brand of research in relation to another. It is very clear to me that there is a false and artificial dichotomy between different research genres and that pursuing this debate is not at all useful, particularly in educational research where it has long been acknowledged that different research paradigms are part of the same continuum. However, having attended this seminar, I am not convinced that what I consider a commonsense understanding of this issue is in fact a consensual one. It is therefore somewhat unsettling that one still has to be an evangelist to provide justification for what is legitimate research. In fact, I consider this an act of coercion, a form of neo-American Colonialism...*

My initial reactive stance was tempered as I conceded that I was perhaps overly critical of a genuine belief (by the protagonist of the call) in the notion of a "policy science" that has typified American education in the 1970's (Grace, 1991). This traditional view of policy analysis was based on a particular view of knowledge, and the way it might be applied to solve social problems. It required knowledge to be scrupulously value-neutral, grounded in essential facts provided by systematic evaluation (see. Taylor, Lingard & Henry, 1997). Only with such an approach to knowledge (it is claimed) "can we add a



measure of rationality to the hurly-burly of policy making and counteract the special pleading and special sectional interests which might otherwise dominate the political process" (ibid.: 18). Although such work has been dismissed as producing naïve solutions, with no sense of the structural, the political and the historical, such studies provide us with a compelling rationale to rethink what constitutes progressive policies.

I contemplated how the field of education policy might be reconstituted, reinvigorated and rearticulated to embrace the goals of social justice, equity and representivity. I am inclined towards the notion of a "policy scholarship", because the notion of scholarship forces movement beyond binaries that lock one into atomised decision-making based on neo-liberal approaches, which privilege dominant canons of enquiry. A policy scholarship involves a process of "creating intellectual puzzles, getting into intellectual binds, and then extracting people from these dilemmas" (Kingdom, 1984). A policy scholarship involves a consistent and scrupulous interrogation of policy through research of and for policy, using a bouquet of approaches and methodologies. It is easy to dismiss this approach as "romantic possibilitarian rhetoric" (Apple, 2001); the challenge is to interrupt our commonsenses by employing the collective gains from various neo-Marxist, Feminist, Postmodern, poststructural, queer and other communities (ibid.: 64). However, Apple adds that while the construction of new theories and utopian visions are important, it is equally crucial to base these theories and visions in an unromantic appraisal of the material and discursive terrain that now exists.

*Without an analysis of such transformations, and of the balance of forces that have created such discomforting alterations, without an analysis of such tensions, differential relations of power, and contradictions within it, we are left with increasingly elegant new theoretical formulations, but with a less than elegant understanding of the field of social power on which they operate.*

(Apple, 2001: 64)

## 7.7 Epilogue

In this study, I have argued for a contextually sensitive approach to theory-based evaluation into institutional identity and organisational behaviour; I have argued for a fundamental rethinking of our positionalities in relation to commonsense understandings of the world, and the potential dangers of imbibing the language of such commonsenses uncritically. I have been cognisant of how easy it is to indulge in an evangelical defence of qualitative research by entrenching the artificial binaries between the qualitative and empiricist paradigm.

I have chosen therefore, to approach this issue obliquely, by problematising conventional evaluation research, arguing that it is in itself inadequate for substantive institutional analysis. I explored the impact of the econometric/technocratic rationality and the impact of the preponderance of empiricist modes of evaluation on Non-Governmental Organisations, investigating how this has shaped their identity in a transitional democracy. I proposed a theoretical justification for empowerment evaluation research as a complementary approach to generate deeper insights into organisational identity. The question that now arises is: to what extent have I been successful in my emancipatory intent?



This question is perhaps best left to the individual participants of this research who have professed in our many conversations that they have benefited significantly from the research experience. However, I have two critical concerns regarding the impact of the research. The first is whether the “illuminating experience at the individual level has set the stage for liberation at the institutional level” (see chapter 2 for an elaboration of empowerment and illuminative evaluation research); and secondly whether Fetterman’s (1999:16) suggestion that empowerment evaluation can “unleash powerful forces for self-determination” has been enacted in this study in any significant way, enabling the illuminative experience of participants to find new opportunities, view existing resources in a new light and redefining their identities and future roles (ibid.: 16).

While I am very reluctant to claim credit, by any means, for the unfolding changes at ELET, I invite the reader to derive his/her own conclusions. The data collection for this study was concluded ‘technically’ in June 2002, at which point I commenced the analysis and subsequent chapters. I returned to ELET in November 2002 to fill in the data-gap, although ‘technically’, the ‘information’ that follows cannot be admitted as data. However, I will offer a brief synopsis of the most significant developments at ELET in an attempt to provide coherence to the biographical continuum.

In November 2002, I was invited to attend a special staff meeting at which crucial decisions about ELET’s future would be taken. Mervin, the director, warned me that the meeting was expected to be “quite volatile”. Contrary to expectations, the meeting was in fact rather sedate and congenial. Instead of explosive resistance, there was consensus that the existing organisational structure of ELET could no longer be sustained. There appeared to be a philosophical acceptance amongst most members that a fundamental reconfiguring of ELET’s identity was inevitable for its continued survival.

The proposed new organisational structure would result in a significant departure from the previous model of a large permanent staff contingent. Instead, the new model would comprise a small central full-time core served by a group of project managers and a network of trainers, tutors and materials developers. The structure can be represented by a circle the size of whose components will vary according to the size and number of projects. The core will comprise the director, the director’s assistant, a part-time office assistant, a financial consultant and part time bookkeeper (see appendix 5) . The status (part or full time) of the financial service will be determined by the size and number of projects. In this reconceptualised organisational model, the role of the director and his assistant would be to:

- Initiate policy;
- Liaise with various educational agencies and government departments, and foundations;
- Directly and indirectly facilitate the raising of both project and core funds;
- Co-ordinate the writing and presenting of project proposals;
- Assist in disciplinary and grievance procedures;
- Networking with various stakeholders by serving on forums for the exchange of ideas;
- Organise staff development;
- Hire staff.

The financial consultant and bookkeeper would henceforth transcend their positions as administrative functionaries and take on a more entrepreneurial role, ensuring that:

- all funds are prudently invested;
- the books are maintained in accordance with established accounting procedures;
- all expenses are monitored, both project and administrative;
- all financial matters are reported to the director, management committee and board of trustees;
- budgets for various projects are co-ordinated.

A common critique levelled at NGOs is that many of them are legitimised employment agencies. While ELET has exercised fiscal discipline in terms of staff remuneration, I have argued in chapter 5 that an NGO with a static staff contingent is potentially counterproductive. Interestingly, the rationale presented for the reconceptualised flexible employment structure at ELET is that it will “provide the organisation with opportunities to attract individuals with unique abilities”.

The changing role function of the project managers also reflects a shift towards infusing a strong entrepreneurial ethic into the organisation, with a stronger focus on efficient reporting mechanisms, closer liaison with project funders and a greater emphasis on project monitoring and quality assurance. There is also a stronger focus on ongoing fiscal and development policy formulation. Significantly, the rationale presented for this model is that it allows ELET to redefine its role from agency for literacy development and assume a more flexible identity. Mervin indicates that the spin off from this redefinition has been immediate. It has successfully tendered for a project astutely coined “Communicating Democratic Values”, a project funded by the United States Information Services (USIS), which involves training teachers to cascade a life skills programme, foregrounding civic rights and responsibilities in schools. It is anticipated that this pilot project would be expanded and eventually infused into the life skills curriculum.

The new organisational model will also infuse a research dimension into all the organisation’s future programmes and academic activities. It will establish closer links with universities and teacher education units, making available its programmes and programme data to postgraduate students for evaluation and analysis. The director concedes that “one of the greatest failings of ELET is that it has not exploited the wealth of potentially valuable in-situ research over the years”. He claims that a stronger research focus will enable the organisation to play a more influential policy role, a role, he believes, the organisation is well placed to play, given its vast repertoire of experiences and skills in the field of teacher development. The director also concedes that the organisation has neglected to develop a marketing ethic, which has resulted in the organisation undermining its own financial viability. The newly conceptualised ELET would devote greater attention towards establishing a stronger public profile by establishing a marketing and PRO wing.

Another significant development is the changing face of the board of trustees. In constituting the new board in 2002, an attempt was made to expand representativity to acknowledge the centrality of environmental education and AIDS education in the future ELET. Hence, the new board has installed two new members representing the environment education sector and one representing the department of health on AIDS. In addition, the board now enjoys representation from the department of Education, an

indication of ELET's strategic attempt to foster new relationships with the education ministry.

However, ascribing unqualified optimism for the above developments is a giant leap of faith in the value of strategy, since strategy is a social and, in particular, a linguistic construction, a particular kind of rhetoric that provides a 'common language used by people at all levels of an organisation in order to determine, justify, and give meaning to the constant stream of actions that the organisation comprises' (Hardy, Palmer, and Phillips, 2000: 3). Ultimately, the real test of performativity will be how effectively ELET's strategic discourse can galvanise the organisation into tangibly generating a community of reason through creative dialectical evolution. I am cautiously optimistic that ELET has the intellectual energy to succeed in this lofty endeavour, but it cannot do it alone.

I commenced this research contemplating the notion of a postmodern conception of evaluation. I was mindful of Chia's argument that in mainstream or 'modernist' thinking and theorizing in the social sciences in general and in organisation studies in particular, reflection on these organizing processes, which make knowledge and knowledge claims possible, is 'skilfully avoided' (Weiskopf, and Willmott, 1999: 6). Chia suggests that organisation analysts 'write about organisations conveniently excluding a deliberate analysis of the very organisational contexts within which they themselves are constrained to operate' (ibid.: 7). Therefore, rather than participate in the accumulation of seemingly authoritative bodies of knowledge about organisations 'out there', I undertook this study as 'an intellectual journey without destination' (ibid.: 6). Like Chia, I believe, through my 'endless' journey that postmodern theorizing and thinking of organisation is founded on an 'ontology of becoming' rather than an ontology of being. Through my engagement in this study, I am able to reaffirm Chia's proposition that, organisation analysis—in the postmodern style of thought—no longer can be thought of as an attempt to,

*... accurately describe and represent an external organisational phenomenon. Instead, it is recognized as an intrinsically constitutive process involving the continual weaving and reweaving of ideas, relationships and material elements in order to generate plausible and coherent accounts which strengthen particular conceptual links. Such accounts are deemed to be accomplishments in their own right and they do not refer to a supposed reality beyond.*

*Organisation as such is an accomplishment, as are theories of organisation.*

(in Weiskopf & Willmott, 1999: 6).

## Postscript

In concluding the last chapter of this thesis, it symbolically marks the conclusion of another significant chapter in my own life, and the beginning of another. As I rejoice in the last days of sabbatical, I reflect on my life as a teacher, teacher educator and educational manager. While the past 22 years as educator have been completely rewarding, my restless spirit beckons new horizons. My next port-of-call will be a large corporate research institute where I assume the role of 'senior research specialist' in its education policy directorate. I embark on this new intellectual journey acutely conscious of the need to adopt a social problems perspective in the study of organisations rather than the exclusively administrative orientation of Weber and Durkheim who continue to exert an enduring influence on organisational theory, or what Scott, (1987) refers to as the preoccupation with the "old institutionalism". This study has nudged me towards a

neoinstitutional orientation where organisations are no more than “taken for granted norms” [rather than] “distinct sectors of society” (Stern and Barley, 1996:149). Such an orientation requires that we acknowledge psycho-social dynamics such as stress, alienation and emotions in the workplace as well as other personal and interpersonal dynamics as legitimate areas of enquiry. While there is an abundance of research and literature in these areas, the obligation for researchers is to transcend the micro or group level analysis and adopt systemic or macro-social lenses, lenses that have the potential to herald a new intellectual crucible. This is an obligation I take seriously and one to which I commit.



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## Glossary of Acronyms and Abbreviations

ANC	<b>African National Congress:</b> Founded in 1912 as a liberation movement, it grew in stature and size to become the first democratic government in 1994.
AV	<b>AngloVaal:</b> A giant corporate enterprise that controlled a wide range of commercial activities. It provided core funding to the English Language Education Trust for almost two decades.
BIC	<b>Basic Interactional Competences</b>
BBC	<b>British Broadcasting Cooperation:</b> Developed literacy programmes in collaboration with ELET.
CBO	<b>Community Based Organisation:</b> Distinguished from NGO's because they are less formally constituted.
CEMT	<b>Certificate for English Medium Teachers:</b> A professional qualification for teachers of English in multilingual contexts, originally accredited by the University of Cambridge's Local Examinations Syndicate.
CEREP	<b>Centre for Education Research Evaluation and Policy</b> (based at the University of Durban Westville, South Africa)
CLP	<b>Cognitive Language Proficiencies</b>
CLT	<b>Communicative Language Teaching</b>
COSATU	<b>Congress of South African Trade Unions:</b> Leading trade Union movement that played a significant role in transforming labour and industrial relations in the 1980's. It became a member of the tripartite alliance, comprising the ANC and South African Communist Party
COTE	<b>Certificate for Overseas Teachers of English:</b> A professional qualification for teachers of English in multilingual contexts, originally accredited by the University of Cambridge's Local Examinations Syndicate
CSL	<b>Community Service Learning:</b> A form of in-situ learning where students are exposed To a range of socio-cultural experiences that enrich to their professional practices
DEC	<b>Department of Education and Culture:</b> A racially segregated apartheid structure that catered for the educational needs of the Black African population in South Africa
DFID	<b>Department for International Development:</b> The international development wing of the British Government
DOTE	<b>Diploma for Overseas Teachers of English:</b> A professional qualification for teachers of English in multilingual contexts, originally accredited by the University of Cambridge's Local Examinations Syndicate
EE	<b>Empowerment Evaluation:</b> Tradition of programme evaluation in which the evaluator creates conditions to enable programme participants to empower themselves through reflective practice
EFL	<b>English as First Language</b>
ELET	<b>English Language Education Trust</b>

EU	<b>European Union</b>
ESL	<b>English as second language</b>
FDE	<b>Further Diploma in Education</b>
GEAR	<b>Growth, Employment and Redistribution:</b> A post-apartheid economic policy, designed ostensibly to address the economic inequalities in SA
IDT	<b>International Development Trust</b>
IE	<b>Illuminative Evaluation:</b> A genre of evaluation research that purposes a substantive understanding of the learning milieu as crucial in understanding institutional and individual behaviour through the lives of individuals who constitute the organisation
INSET	<b>In-service Education and Training</b>
JET	<b>Joint Education Trust:</b> A large non-governmental research organisation in SA
LANGTAG	<b>Language Task Group:</b> A task team responsible for recommending language policy proposals to the government
LLC	<b>Language Literacy and Communication:</b> The revised nomenclature for “language” as a school subject, which comprises one of the learning areas in curriculum 2005
MDM	<b>Mass Democratic Movement:</b> An amalgam of anti-apartheid political movements that joined forces to overthrow the apartheid government
NEHAU	<b>National Health and Allied Workers Union</b>
NEPI	<b>National Education Policy Initiative:</b> An anti-apartheid movement comprising representatives from the various education sectors which attempted to engineer an alternative education policy to the state’s Bantu education
NPO	<b>Non Profit Organisation</b>
OBE	<b>Outcomes Based Education</b>
ODA	<b>Official Development Assistance</b>
PRA	<b>Participatory Rural Action</b>
PER	<b>Programme Evaluation Research</b>
PETRA	<b>Primary English Teaching in Rural Areas:</b> A teaching qualification offered by ELET, accredited by the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate.
PHASE	<b>Project for Health and Sanitation Education:</b> A literacy programme to address water and sanitation problems in rural areas
QUANGO	<b>Quasi-Autonomous Non-Governmental Organisation</b> NGOs with a potential role to play in transforming society, but vulnerable to co-option by the state into only quasi-autonomous or (hybrid) <i>de facto</i> market institutions.
RDP	<b>Reconstruction and Development Programme:</b> A post-apartheid economic policy which attempted to address the economic inequalities amongst the different racial groups
REQV	<b>Recognised Equivalent Qualification Value</b>
REFLECT	<b>Regenerated Frerian Literacy Through Empowerment Community Techniques</b>



<b>SACHED</b>	<b>South African Council on Higher Education:</b> A statutory body that regulates Higher Education
<b>SAQA</b>	<b>South African Qualifications Authority:</b> A statutory body that regulates qualifications
<b>SLOT</b>	<b>School's Library Project:</b> A literacy programme sponsored by Japanese citizens in which teachers are trained to utilise the reading materials donated by the Japanese
<b>SPM</b>	<b>Strategic Planning Meeting</b>
<b>SOSTRIS</b>	<b>Social Strategies in Risk Societies</b>
<b>TESOL</b>	<b>Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages</b>
<b>TIO</b>	<b>Technical Innovation Organisations</b>
<b>UCLES</b>	<b>University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate</b>
<b>UND</b>	<b>University of Natal (Durban)</b>
<b>UNESCO</b>	<b>United Nations Education &amp; Scientific Cooperation</b>
<b>UNISA</b>	<b>University of South Africa</b>
<b>USAID</b>	<b>United States Aid</b>
<b>UNP</b>	<b>University of Natal (Pietermaritzburg)</b>
<b>WEF</b>	<b>World Education Forum</b>
<b>WITS</b>	<b>University of the Witwatersrand</b>

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**Appendix 1: Letter of Introduction****RUBBY DHUNPATH**

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12 Feb. 01

Dear Colleagues at ELET

I am a graduate of the CEMT course, which I completed in 1994. ELET has been instrumental in impacting significantly on my professional life, and I am presently reading for a PhD at WITS University in the field of Language Education and teacher development. The title of my study is: Archaeology of a Language Development NGO: Excavating the Identity of the English Language Educational Trust.

Employing the Lifehistory method as a tool for naturalistic/qualitative evaluation research, the study examines the mutating identity of a language development NGO in the context of a country in democratic transition. Viewed through the eyes of Mervin Ogle, Cecil Fynn, the programme coordinators, tutors, administrators, past and present students, graduates and significant others, the study examines the competing influences that have shaped the identity of ELET during the period 1984 to 2001. The focus here is to explore, (given the dynamic political, economic and pedagogic conditions as well as the changing funding imperatives of the democratic Government), how ELET has redefined its role, re-engineered its programmes, responded strategically to emerging changes, and survived, at a time when a large cohort of language NGO's have died untimely deaths.

A subsidiary but related component of the research is a retrospective evaluation of the professional language development programmes of ELET, during the years 1990 to 2000. This evaluation is conducted using the biographical approach, and aims to gain insight into ELET's language development programmes through the eyes of its graduates. The courses being evaluated are: The Certificate for English Medium Teachers (CEMT) and The Further Diploma in Education (FDE). The purpose of this exercise is to establish, through the professional life histories of selected graduates, whether the language pedagogy of a practitioner is changed through NGO intervention. This component of the study seeks to examine, through the lenses of critical theory, the theoretical, philosophical and methodological tenets that underpin English language teaching in the context of the emergent multi-lingual/multi-cultural contexts. In particular, the study seeks to evaluate the influence of language teaching intervention programmes of ELET, on praxis, and the extent to which these learning experiences influence the construction of individual and institutional identity. Finally, in evaluating the changing role of a language development service provider and its potential to effect change in language teaching pedagogy, the study aims to propose a theory of Educational change in transitional contexts.

I would be grateful and honoured if you would grant me access to course materials, access to your students, and the opportunity to interview you at some stage. I believe that the study will have multiple benefits for ELET. Firstly, it will allow members of the ELET team to reflect on their professional lives as they recreate the institutional memory. Secondly, it will serve to document the institutional memory of ELET, highlighting its contribution to language development in South Africa, and thirdly, it will make public sound methodological practices in



language development and it could reveal to the institution inadequacies in its programmes with the view to instituting appropriate reforms.

I look forward to working with you and sharing a mutually rewarding relationship.

Yours Faithfully

Rubby Dhunpath

## Appendix 2: Request for Member checks



From the Desk of  
**RUBBY DHUNPATH**

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TO:

Mervin, Teboho, Tracy

Dear Friends,

Here it finally is, chapter three of my research report. This chapter is devoted to the interview data, which you so generously made available to me over the past fifteen months. I am eternally grateful to you for making time to talk to me amidst your punishing work schedules. In order to justify the time and effort you spent on this exercise, I would like you to read the chapter critically, giving me your unreserved comments and suggestions on how to improve the final product. I implore you to read the following notes carefully as this will clarify the status of the chapter as it presently is, and assist you in critiquing the text.

1. This is only the FIRST DRAFT. I anticipate editing this chapter after I receive feedback from you.
2. In its present form, you will find many inaccuracies in the text, for the following reasons:
  - 2.1 In order to preserve the authenticity and accuracy of the recorded interview, I employed an independent researcher to perform the transcription. Hence certain bits of data that were inaudible may not appear in the text at this stage. Also, names, places etc may be inaccurate.
  - 2.2 In order to make the text accessible and interesting to the reader, I chose to "**factionalise**" the data. i.e. using the actual data (facts), I transmuted it into a continuous narrative. Another stylistic device I used is shifting between first and third person narrator. Occasionally, I use **your** words but present them in third person narration to introduce variety in narrative technique. The final edited text will therefore read as a novel. This technique necessitated minor adjustments in the representation of the location and context in which the data was produced. The intention was not to interfere with the accuracy of the data, but to cohere the story into a seamless narrative. If at any stage in the narrative, you feel that you have been misrepresented, misunderstood, or inappropriately portrayed, I make a humble appeal to you to bring this to my attention.
3. In order to contain the narrative into a readable 60 pages, I have edited out, what I considered 'less relevant' data. However the original data remains on record and will be reintroduced into the text if you should deem it necessary.
4. Interview transcripts are, in themselves, fragmentary and sometimes incoherent. To cohere the sometimes-discordant narrative threads that developed over the period of fifteen months, I needed to make stylistic changes in the re-presentation of the narrative. These changes range from minor, to significant, depending on the intensity of discord in the narrative threads. But at all times, the integrity of the data must be preserved, retaining its factual accuracy. Further-nore, in shaping the narrative, I made a conscious effort not to displace the characteristic nuances and the individual 'flavour' of your voices, both syntactically as well as semantically. It is vitally important for me as researcher to represent you as

authentically as possible. If in the process of representation the stylistic changes have distorted your character, I have an obligation to correct it. I urge you therefore to be incisive in your critique.

5. At this stage, I have represented you in your **real personas**. If you feel uncomfortable with this or if you believe using your actual identities may be ill advised for whatever

6. To supplement the written text, I will be using other forms of data such as photographs, newspaper clippings, etc.

Finally dear friends, I must admit that writing this story was one of the more difficult and challenging tasks I've engaged in to date, but it was also a rewarding and fulfilling experience. Ultimately, however, although I've been the author of this text, please remember that it is your story that I've tried to capture, and as such, it is important to me that you are comfortable with it.

I will be overseas for the month of May and will return in the second week of June. I look forward to your candid comments and suggestions on my return.

Many Thanks and warm regards

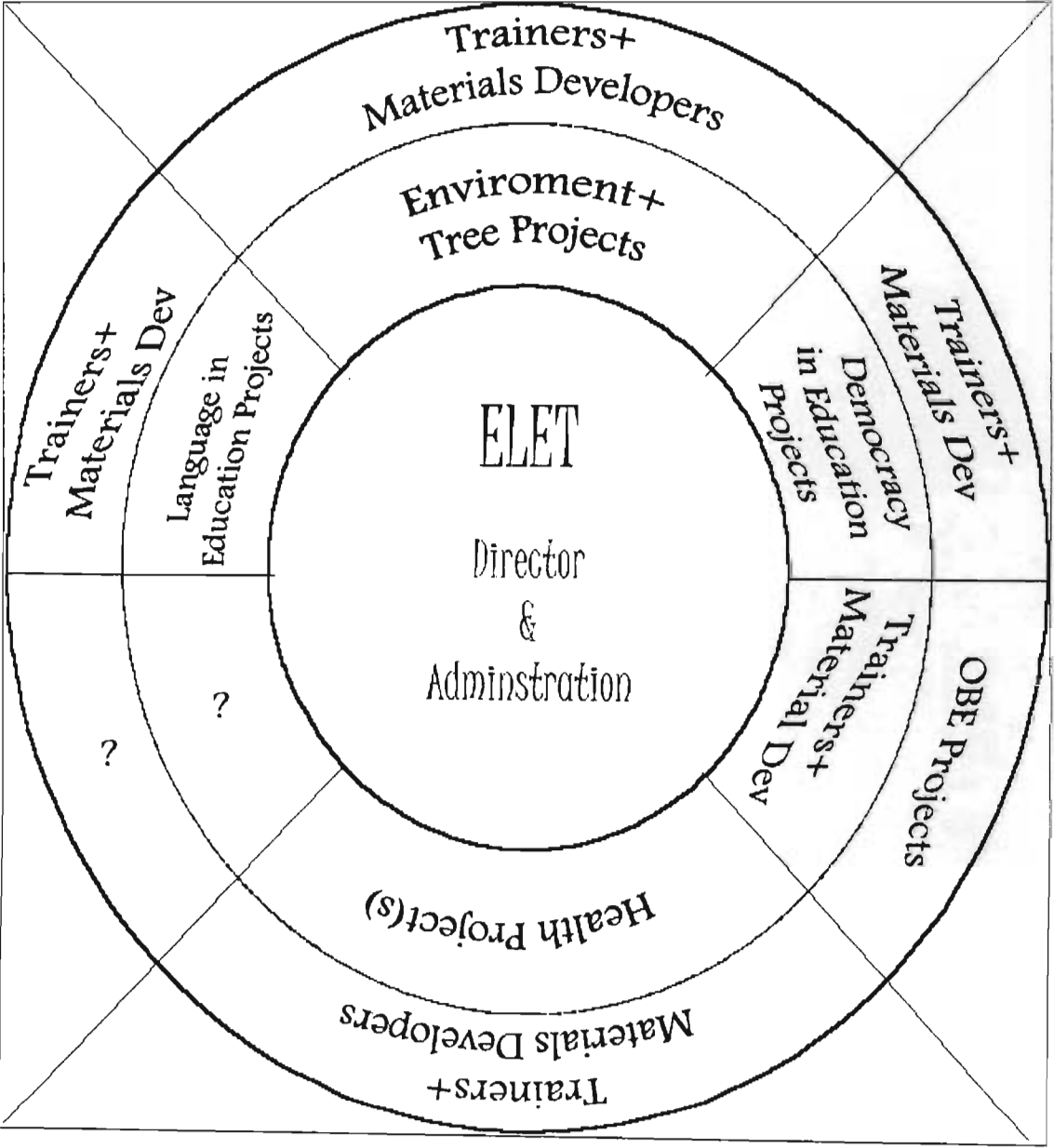
Yours Faithfully

**Rubby Dhunpath**

---

Research Fellow of the Spencer Foundation  
University of Durban-Westville

Appendix 3: ELET's Proposed New Organisational Structure





## **Appendix 4: SAMPLE OF INTERVIEW SCHEDULES**

### **Mervyn Ogle**

1. What prompted you to leave South Africa and go to Zambia? When you reflect on your years in Zambia, what would you consider to be the most significant and noteworthy influences on your professional life and your life as a teacher educator?
2. What influenced you to return to South Africa?
3. Can you recall the experience of returning home after 15 years. Had the country changed? How did you cope with the transition?
4. Did you observe any change in the practice of language teaching/learning in SA?
5. Was there an evolution or development in the field of language teacher education?
6. When you returned you took on a post at Bechet College. What were the circumstances, which influenced that choice?
7. Had you at any point considered a career other than teaching? Did you have other choices? Was making language teaching a career a conscious one?
8. When you entered Bechet, were you already inspired by a transformational vision?
9. How would you describe what this vision was and what shaped it?
10. I know that people like Rod Ellis and Brian Tomlinson shaped your formative experiences. Was your thinking propelled by any particular philosophical school? How do you think this philosophical orientation developed?
11. Do you still subscribe to this philosophical worldview?
12. What were your experiences at Bechet?
13. When you accepted the post offered to you by the Anglo Vaal, did you have a clear sense of purpose of what needed to be done in the field of language development.
14. What, in your view, were the challenges facing you and the institute you were about to launch?

### **Mervyn Ogle**

Managing an institution with such diverse interests and activities is not always easy. You mentioned in an earlier interview that one of the key ingredients for success is passion.

- Do other members of ELET share the same passion for language development?
- How do you ensure that your vision for language development is shared and sustained amongst other members of ELET?
- To what would you attribute ELET's success over the years?
- Are you satisfied that you have accomplished your mission?
- Do you have any regrets about how things have turned out at ELET. Is there anything you would do differently if you were to start over again?

Ken Hartshorne, in an earlier evaluation report commended ELET for promoting CLT, as a progressive methodology, but cautioned that in moving teachers away from traditional methods, we should be mindful of the fact that teachers often use new methods only when they were on show.

- Has this been your observation too?
- You did, if I remember, on two occasions express certain reservations about the role of CLT as a methodology. What are these reservations?

### **Mervyn Ogle**

A. I want to focus on a period of ELET's history, which you once described as turbulent, a period when ELET was being hijacked by certain elements for political motives.

1. Describe the events that made this a turbulent period.
2. What were the repercussions or consequences of this attempted subterfuge for ELET and for you?
3. To what extent would you regard ELET's work as "political"?
4. How would you describe your management style?

B For a variety of reasons, many NGO's and perhaps Language NGOs in particular have suffered untimely

Deaths:

1. What in your view has been responsible for the changing fortunes of NGO's and why have so many of them not been able to survive?
2. What is different about ELET? How has it been able to expand its service provision in the context of funding cuts and declining student numbers?
3. When you reflect on the History of the NGO movement in general and ELET in particular, what would you say are the some of the factors/ingredients that have contributed to its success as a relevant service provider?
4. If you had to define the identity of ELET, how would you define it?
5. Does ELET bear a characteristic trademark of Mervyn Ogle? Or does it reflect other influences? What are some of the other influences that have shaped ELET's identity?

C. The Strategic Planning workshop was an extremely illuminating experience for me. It gave me a sense of perspective and proportion and provided me with an insider view into some of the opportunities, dynamics and tensions that seems to characterise ELET.

1. What were your expectations of the strategic planning workshops?
2. Did the workshop actually realise your expectations?
3. There was sense of some members experiencing a loss of identity or an identity crisis in respect of the changes ELET was undergoing. Do you sense a crisis of identity in ELET with regard to the institution you originally conceived, and the shape it is taking now?
4. Some individuals at the SPM expressed a sense of alienation and apprehension, regarding the work they were doing as marginal in relation to the mainstream activities of ELET. What is your response to this apprehension?
5. Do you envisage the marginal eventually becoming mainstream?

## TRACY

1. Tell me a little about your background:
  - Your educational background
  - Your work experience
  - Your links with the NGO world
2. How did you first become involved with ELET?
3. Trace the origins of the PHASE programme. What inspired you to get involved in the programme?
4. If you had to motivate for funding to the minister of education:
  - What would you say to him are the essential features of PHASE?
  - What are the core principles on which PHASE is grounded?
  - What compelling reasons can you provide for a department of education investing in this programme?
5. Is there a link between PHASE and literacy?
6. What is the relationship between English Language and PHASE?
7. You said at the strategic planning meeting that we "need to redefine the notion of health projects so that it is not limited to health". Can you describe your vision for the future of PHASE and ELET?
8. You offered several alternatives for the future of PHASE and its possible relationship with ELET: either it be part of or affiliated to or separate from ELET? How would you like to see the identity of PHASE emerging in relation to ELET?
9. You said at the strategic planning meeting that you feel that PHASE exists on the margins of ELET and that the project is not sufficiently valued:
  - What is the source of this tension?
  - Do you anticipate that someday, the PHASE programme would in fact be the mainstream?

### Tracy

1. When we last spoke, you reflected on your beginnings with the PHASE project and suggested that you entered the project by default.
  - ❖ Its now been more than 5 years since your introduction to the programme. How do you feel about it now?
  - ❖ Do you feel you have made the correct career choice? Is there something else you would rather be doing?
  - ❖ What is it about the work you do that sustains your interest and energy?
2. In our last meeting I argued that the link between literacy and PHASE is not, as you suggested, a tenuous one, but is in fact quite an intimate one. Have you given that any further thought?
3. Since our last meeting, we had the second strategic planning meeting where certain decisions were mooted.
  - ❖ What for you were some of the more significant decisions taken at the meeting?
  - ❖ What was your reaction to the proposed name change to incorporate the Environmental component of ELET's work?
  - ❖ What aspect of the meeting failed to satisfy your expectations?
  - ❖ You mentioned in our last meeting that your vision for the work you do at ELET could not be accomplished within the present leadership. Has that changed in any way?
4. I read your proposal for the Siyathuthuka project. How was that project borne?
  - ❖ How did the notion of "an "Unloved" school emerge?
  - ❖ What has been the funders' response to the proposal
  - ❖ How has the proposed project been received by the school communities?
5. When we spoke over the telephone on Tuesday, and in fact in our last meeting, I got the impression that you had something of a love-hate relationship with the USAID project:
  - ❖ Why do you feel this way about the project?
  - ❖ Do you feel that the project is placing excessive demands on your time and energies?
6. When we concluded the last interview, you were telling me about the value of grouping schools. I think you call it "peer educator workshops".
  - ❖ Tell me more about this approach and why you find it useful
  - ❖ Some cynics suggest that teachers capitalise on opportunities to "escape" their daily routines and attend such workshops, but fail to generate any positive spin-offs for their peers when they return to work. In your experience, has this been true?

### Teboho

1. You come from an NGO background. Tell me about your experiences, interactions, impressions of the NGO movement in general, and language NGO's in particular,
2. NGO's, which were fairly influential in the pre-1994 era, have come under increasing criticism an attack in recent times. Jansen, Gultig and others have questioned their effectiveness and benefit to society? Do you agree with this critique? What are the challenges facing NGO's in the new democratic era?
3. Why, in your view, have so many NGO's aborted their activities?
3. Anglo-Vaal has been responsible for the advent of ELET in the 80's.
  - 3.1 Why should an NGO be supported by a mega corporate organisation?
  - 3.2 Why did AV at that stage invested in ELET?
  - 3.3 Why has AV decided to reduce its funding to ELET?
  - 3.4 Do you support the changing imperatives of AV in relation to funding?
  - 3.5
4. How would you assess your engagement with ELET over the years and what are your perceptions of the institution's contribution to development within the broader context of educational development in South Africa,

5. Trace the trajectory of change under your chairmanship- what were the challenges Facing ELET then, in the mid term and now.
6. A critical appraisal of your engagement with ELET as a board member, focusing particularly on
  - 6.1. Does ELET's work resonate with your own developmental philosophy and mission,
  - 6.2 To what extent has the identity of the ELET been shaped and influenced by your engagement with it,
7. What in your view, has determined ELET's "successful" history, and how has it been able to survive in a volatile NGO climate.
8. Are you aware of other NGO's (language NGO's in particular) which have had a more or less successful history as ELET?
9. What does it mean to be a black woman as chair of a respected NGO? What advantages have the fact that you are a woman had on your role as chair?
10. What were your expectations of the strategic planning meeting. As chair of the board, did the meeting satisfy your expectations?
11. What in your view did not happen at the SPM?
12. Which of the resolutions are achievable, in steering ELET forward productively?
13. What is your prognosis for ELET's health as it enters a new phase of self sufficiency and self reliance?

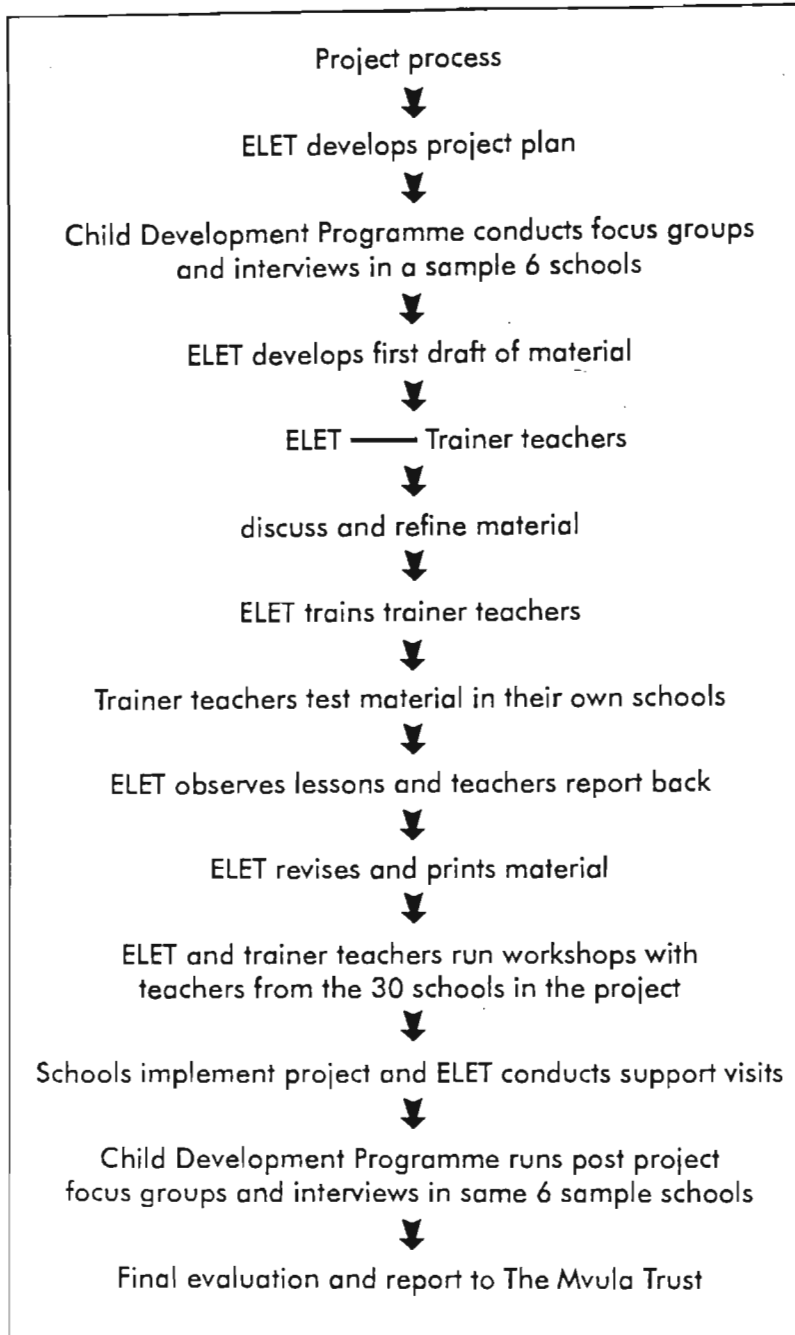
### **Cheron**

1. I know tha you've always had an interest in development work? Can you recall what inspired that?
2. You joined ELET in 1994? Tell me a little about what you did before that?
3. NGOs depend heavily on a degree of voluntarism out there where people are willing to do something for nothing. Is that spirit still as strong as it was perhaps 10 years ago? What's the spirit out there like in the country today?
4. What were your expectations when you joined ELET?
5. There were no ground rules when you came into the organisation... you were left to your own devices. What is it like being left to your own devices? I would imagine that you had to chart your own way and find your own niche. Tell me about your first project
6. Elet has gone through different phases ? ELET is now, in the post 94 era in the Diversification phase - what prompted this?
7. What would you say was your most significant experience at ELET ?
8. Were you part of that turbulent phase of Elet's history when the four individuals attempted to sabotage ELET's work?
9. Some people would say that although you came in relatively late into the institution it is difficult to imagine ELET without Cheron. How do you view your position in the organisation?
10. This is a volatile dynamic period for NGOs. Many language NGOs have fallen. What has ELET

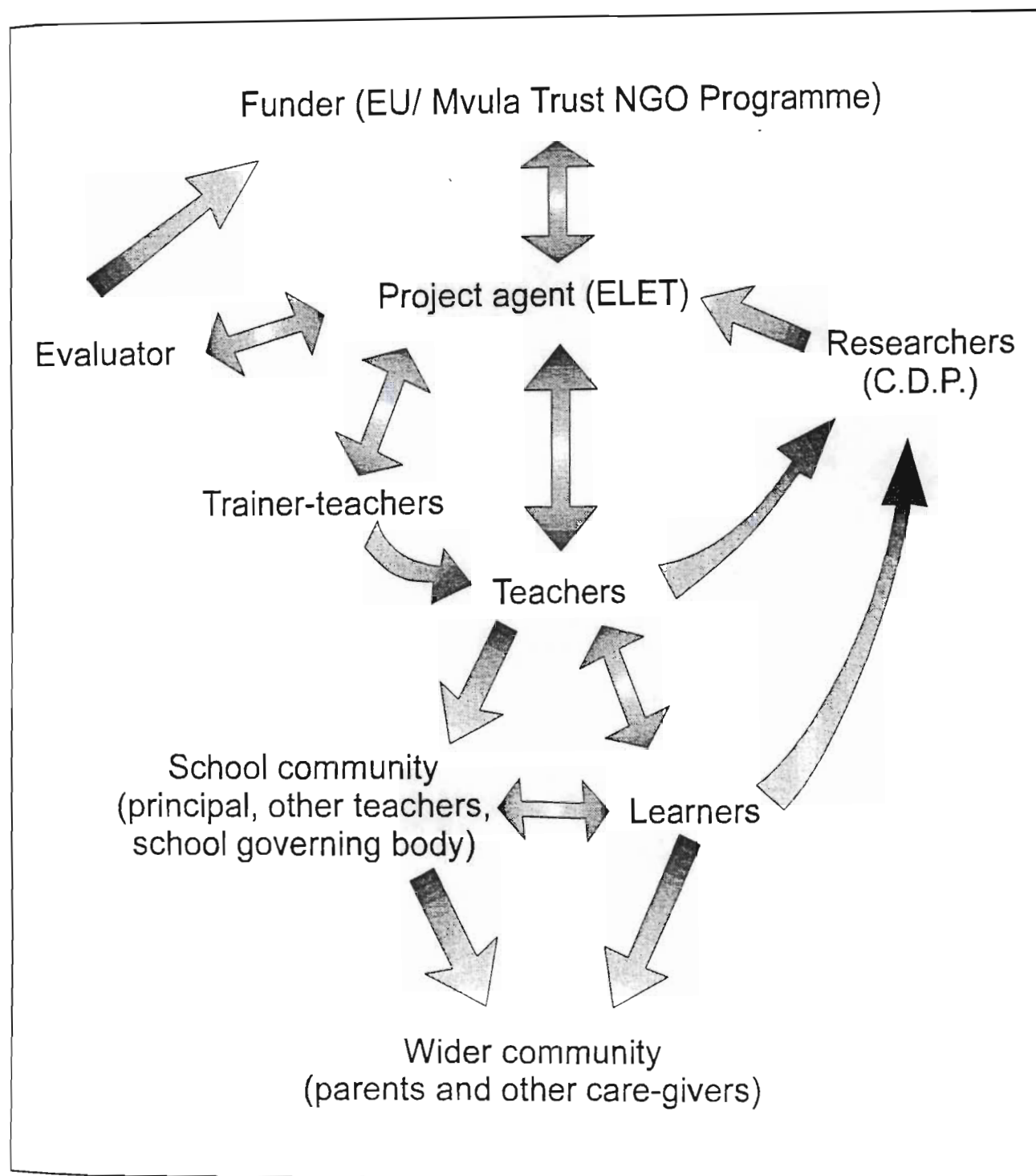


done to survive?

11. One of the gripes of most strategic planning is that there is far too much structure, or that it is too unstructured... People are also concerned that nothing comes after the meeting. Do you share the same view?
12. In a sense ELET management structure has evolved to a horizontal management structure, which is in nouveau in management theory. I'm wondering whether ELET has a particular management flavour, which is perhaps a response to the kinds of people who work in the organisation?
13. Being a language person essentially, are you comfortable with the shifts taking place... such as the name change. How do you feel about that?

*Appendix 5: Implementation of PHASE: Cascade model*

Appendix 6: Implementation of PHASE: Flow chart



Appendix 7: Traditional and Cultural Knowledge: Using Comic Strips

